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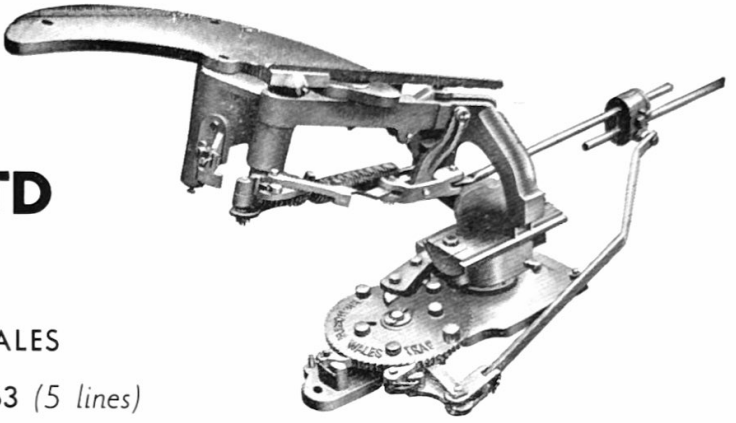

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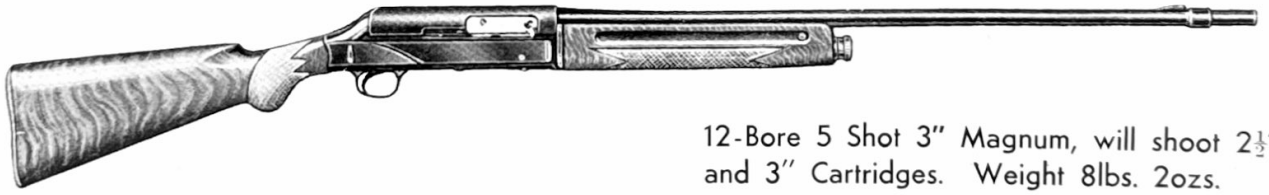

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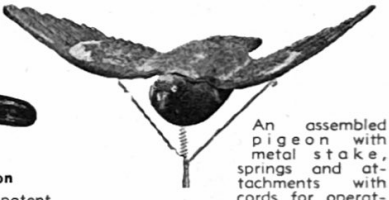

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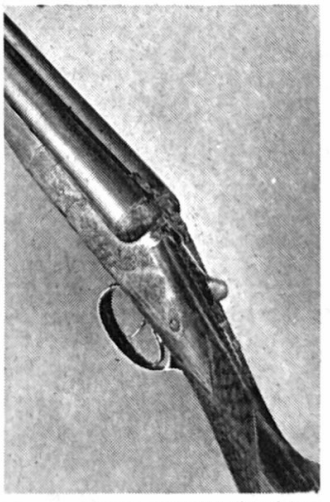

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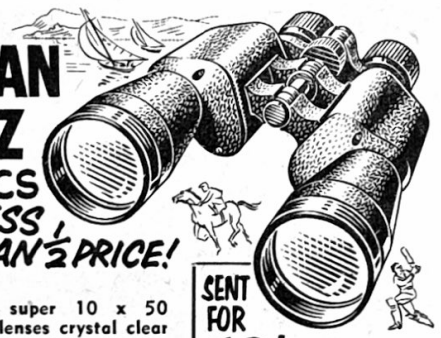

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The Gun Trade and P.T.

A RECENT enquiry from an Irish gunmaker asks where he may obtain armourer's tools. He had previously written to a firm of world-wide reputation that used to specialise in their manufacture, only to be told regretfully that the demand did not justify the continued production of tools employed in shotgun manufacture. Here is one more pointer to remind us that the future of this country's gunmaking is very far from assured. Last month, the Gunmakers' Association sent a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer asking for the removal of purchase tax from shotguns and cartridges. The text of this request calls attention to the sad plight of an ancient craft which is annually diminishing in size due to a variety of reasons, but principally to the costs of manufacture brought about by the high labour content in the product. These costs, already high, are, however, increased out of all proportion by the addition of a thirty per cent purchase tax.

The manufacture of shotguns is located principally in London and Birmingham, where much of the work is undertaken by outworkers. In Birmingham, due to the construction of the Inner Ring Road by the Corporation, the greater proportion of the Trade are to be dispossessed in the next year or so, indeed, some of them are already affected. The Trade is very concerned that unless some special incentive can be given soon the result of this upheaval will be that many Birmingham firms, especially the smaller ones and some key outworkers, will decide that it is not worth their while to carry on.

The Trade have always felt that purchase tax was levied on shotguns in the mistaken belief that they are essentially "sporting weapons." Some of the principal users are farmers and gamekeepers, who use them to keep down vermin. As such, shotguns should be considered one of their tools of trade, which as a general principle are not taxable. Whilst it is true that some shotguns are used purely for sporting purposes for the shooting of game, this must be one of the few sports which has a useful end product and which provides a source of food.

Purchase tax has never been levied on rifles, due, possibly to such a high proportion being used for target practice, although it might be pointed out that rifles are also used for shooting game and vermin.

The case for the removal of purchase tax from cartridges is more obvious. Of the total cartridges produced it has been estimated that some 50 per cent or more are used for the destruction of vermin. The removal of purchase tax and the subsequent reduction in price would be one of the greatest encouragements to the agricultural community to concentrate on the destruction of all vermin, and thus give direct help towards obtaining an increase in home-grown food. Every encouragement is already given by a variety of subsidies to increase home-grown food. It would seem logical, therefore, to ensure as far as possible that the crops should not be lost as food for vermin.

Such is the gist of the Gunmakers' Association's request, which will be supported, naturally, by all who shoot. If all shooting men gave practical backing to the efforts of the Trade, by writing to their M.P.s on similar lines, they might help to save and to strengthen the position of one of the country's remaining ancient craft industries.

THE SHOOTING TIMES
AND
COUNTRY MAGAZINE
Incorporating FIELD SPORTS

Official Organ of
THE WILDFOWLERS' ASSOCIATION
OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

No. 3941 FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 1958 Founded 1882

The wild life of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust. We must account for it to those who come after.—King George VI.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Game Fair

The Country Landowners' Association has now sent me more details of their Game Fair which is to be held on Friday and Saturday, July 25 and 26 at the Hall Farm, Stetchworth, near Newmarket.

The aim of this fair is to help the owner-farmer who, although keen to work up a good shoot has insufficient acreage to warrant the employment of a professional keeper.

Demonstrations which will take place each day will be on the rearing field where it is hoped to illustrate modern game rearing methods such as movable pens, electric brooders, crumb foods etc. It is hoped to have 500 birds of all ages on show including pheasants, partridges and wild duck. There will also be demonstrations in archery, falconry and wildfowling.

Exhibitions are being staged by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries with regard to control of farm pests, and an exhibition of high farming compatible with game farming, and similarly by the Forestry Commission in the production of mature timber compatible with game management.

There will be something to interest the general public as well as all sportsmen, including such items as an exhibition of game transport from about the year 1900 and competitions in clay pigeon shooting.

The Game Fair will be open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day and the entrance charges to the public will be 2s. 6d. Charges will also be made for car parking at 5s. per motor car and 2s. 6d. per motor cycle.

Women Shooters

Someone once said that "a masculine woman is as despicable as an effeminate man" and it might be thought — indeed often is, that all women shooters must be of a highly masculine nature. Such, I am happy to report, has not been my experience, for most of the fair sex whom I have met in the shooting field, have resembled Diana rather than Amazons. And, moreover, they have usually been good shots, which does not surprise me greatly, since shooting is not a popular sport amongst women (praise be, I hear the menfolk muttering) and those who do take it up are, as might be expected, keen to the point of high efficiency.

Whether women shooters should be encouraged, and whether it is an advantage or otherwise to marry a wife who shares one's love of shooting, I leave to readers with more experience in such matters to judge. It would be interesting to have their views, and, of course, those of the ladies.

I have a suspicion, however, that the majority male opinion will coincide with that of an old writer who held that "sport and ladies' company are two pleasures so widely differing from one another that to endeavour to participate in them at one and the same time would be to negative the thorough enjoyment of either."

More Guns for Hire

My earlier note on this subject has drawn a letter from Miss M. E. Brown, one of the directors of Stephen Grant and Joseph Lang Ltd., in which she reminds me that for at least five years her firm has set aside five 12-bores ready for hiring or lending to shooters in an emergency. The charge for this service, which strikes me as very reasonable, is three guineas for the first week and one and a half guineas per subsequent week. It is appreciated that young shots especially may not be in the position to afford a gun of their own and this gives them an opportunity of enjoying a few days' sport during the season without incurring a great deal of expense.

I understand that this is a popular service, and that the guns are always in and out.

Stolen Guns

On February 20, the following guns were stolen from 41 Westfield Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham.

A pair of 12-bore double-barrelled shotguns, serial numbers 14173 and 14174. Sidelock ejectors fitted with rubber recoil pads. 26in. barrels, with the maker's name "William Powell" engraved thereon and contained in a leather case.

One 10-bore double-barrelled shotgun, serial number 17637, chamberless, hammerless ejector. Maker's name "W. Ford" and game scenes engraved on the side.

If anyone can give any information that may lead to the recovery of the above, will he please get in touch with the Chief Constable's Office (C.I.D.) P.O. Box No. 52, Newton Street, Birmingham 4 (Central 5000) or any police station.

Comparative Prices

I have just read a plaintive article (not, I am happy to say, in a sporting periodical) the burden of which was a comparison of prices obtaining in 1935 with those of today. Fishing tackle and other field sports equipment was mentioned.

Such comparisons are futile, for one might as well go back to prices in the first Elizabethan age. Costs in 1935 have to be judged against earnings (and in many cases no earnings at all). If comparisons are necessary they can only be fairly made by working out the price as a percentage of average incomes.

AUCEPS.

Mole-Catcher and Woodman

by Tower-Bird

SELDOM, if ever, in these days does the village street echo to the cries and the ringing bell of the muffinman; the "scissors and knives to sharpen and umbrellas to mend" raucous call of the itinerate knife-grinder; the insistant shout of the dealer in rabbit skins—and others of their kind. Even the chair-menders and the old-iron man no longer risk laryngitis, but leave a printed notice to say they will be calling back shortly. While us older-'uns remember well these craftsmen living an independent, wandering life, many of the rising generation may never have seen them, or listened to their once well-known calls. Like many of the "cries of old London" they belong to the past.

In the sphere of general rural crafts—such as thatching, hurdle-making etc.—steps are being taken to keep them alive; even so, we can never expect again to come across those fine and often amusing, and certainly contented characters who fell under such headings as Shepherds, Woodmen, Mole-Catchers—to mention but three. They were nature's gentlemen, taught their craft by a father who learned it from his father, and experience added to the wisdom and tricks-of-the-trade of successive generations.

Mole Catcher of the Old School

The last genuine mole-catcher of the old school who came my way died close on a score of years ago. He was a thin, bent figure who always wore one of those hard, black, bowler-like hats and a long frock coat. He made his own traps, and I often spent an hour or so in his cottage helping him with them, for I was making mole-traps almost as soon as I could toddle. Right up to end of his mole-catching days, he kept a wire or two under the traps in his bag, and would slip these down in hare or rabbit runs. Indeed, it was after my romping dogs had accidently knocked his bag flying, revealing his small stock of hare and ribbit wires, that I was forced to waggle my finger under his nose and threaten him with a cold prison cell unless he left these "engines" behind when catching moles on the ground for which I was responsible. He chewed mightily on his toothless gums and shook his long white beard in apparant deep sorrow, but his old eyes twinkled like periwinkles.

A minor tragedy occurred during our association, for I had a fine collie dog which I had been forced to leave in other hands during frequent absences from home. The result was that a good-temepered dog had become sly and untrustworthy. One morning, as I was walking along the road, I spied the bent, shuffling figure of the now-retired mole-catcher. I hastened to catch up with him, for I knew he was on his way to the village to draw his pension, and I wanted to buy him a drink and enjoy a chat. I idly noticed Lassie trot up to the deaf old man and run her nose up the rear portion of his trousers. Next moment, having heard nothing and wondering what was happening, the old boy raised his stick and turned slowly round, which movement and seeming threat caused the collie to nip him in the leg. As I had heard rumours and received certain complaints on my return home, and not wishing to part with the bitch to anyone else, for I knew she would never be happy, I took her home, and shot her.

One of nature's gentlemen who will be missed as much as any by those whose way took them to the wood, often or occasionally, is the old-time woodman. Maybe he worked in but one wood all his life, cutting and clearing ten acres a season. Down came the ash-poles, a number of suitable ones being kept for housewife's clothes-props. Faggot and pea-stick piles grew almost daily in the ever-widening clearing. Fencing posts were cut and sharpened, and bean-poles tied in bundles. During a break for his elevenses and during the dinner hour, if you walked up the ride to where a plume of smoke rose in the still air, or was "bent" by wind so that it blew among the trees, you would come across a lean-to of corrugated iron sheeting, behind which the woodman sat, sheltered and thoughtful. All day he worked alone with axe, and hook and saw, day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year. Some worked their wood for fifty and more years, and I knew one who had worked in the same wood for close on seventy years.

A Useful Ally

Men came from the farm to draw away the poles and fencing stakes, to fetch pea-sticks, faggots, and bean-poles. The keeper on his rounds might call in once or twice a day, or only once or twice a week. An occasional shooting party was a major event. Yet through heavy rain, light drizzle, hail, snow, and under the thirst-forming heat of a relentless summer sun the woodman went about his job—steadily but efficiently, wasting not a minute of his employer's time (lest it be to retrieve a stoated rabbit the screams of which had echoed through the wood), but kept to his elevenses and dinner hour to the minute.

How useful I found the woodman when I was looking after a large wood. He might show me a clutch of pheasant eggs, or leave word with his wife in the village that a family of stoats had made their appearance. He would deal gruffly but well with trespassers and flower-gatherers during the spring and summer months, and many the name he has provided of men or boys making an appearance in the wood on minor poaching affrays.

On the Seventh Day

On Sundays, he would dress up in his Sabbath suit and would walk with his wife and sometimes his son or daughters across the fields and round "his" wood, and in this way acted as a "relief" when I wanted to be elsewhere. As a naturalist as we know the breed today he did not shine, but he knew enough of local beasts and birds to be more than useful to the keeper. If, as did happen, rarely, I wanted him to look at my rabbit traps (which meant taking out the catch and perhaps even re-setting, and shouldering a heavy bundle of rabbits right through the wood with its deep-rutted, muddy rides in order to deposit them in the hut), he was always willing enough, but he reached the wood a couple of hours, perhap, earlier than usual, and made certain of starting work on his own job dead on time.

I often stood and watched him at his work, or sitting eating a hunk of bread and a raw onion in his shelter, and wondered seriously whether he did not have the best job in the world. There was no real responsibility, yet untold satisfaction in a craft carried out and a job well done. Does the wealthy stockbroker in his city office, or the navvy digging a hole in the street outside it enjoy life as much ? Does the office-clerk or the shop-walker, warm and dry during a cold winter, feel as contented ? That cutting and trimming can be hard work, and unpleasant under certain conditions, I know from first-hand experience, and maybe few men would care for the monotony of the long walk to the wood and the long walk back in the late afternoon, always along the same track. Maybe the loneliness would sicken many within a week, or even a day or two.

But, say what you like, this valuable work of the old woodman, and his whole way of life takes a bit of beating—especially today. Contentment was his watchword; craftsmanship his proud boast.

All the many woodmen I have known of the old school seemed happy with their lot. They grumbled as all men grumble—and probably even archangels—but they went home tired at night and rose early in the morning. Probably on Saturday evening they walked to their favourite inn and enjoyed a game of dominoes or crib with their cronies.

Somehow, although there be exceptions which prove the rule, I find it hard to imagine a modern youth taking on the craft and routine of the old woodman. Would his mind be dwelling with satisfaction on the stoated rabbit he had recovered that morning, or on the T.V. programme to come that night ? Would he be content to tramp the well-worn path to and from the clearing in the wood—day after day for fifty years ?

Personally if I had the simple choice of a well-paid, weather-protected job in a modern factory, or that of a lonely woodman—well, I would have no hesitation at all in making the choice.

Steps are being taken to keep many of the rural crafts alive—such as thatching.

RATING ASSESSMENTS ON SHOOTS

by George C. Mason

THE case which the Lands Tribunal recently decided in Myddleton and Myddleton v. Charles concerning the rating of shooting rights in North Wales is of unusual interest in the sphere of sporting rating because, as opposed to the majority of such cases, which relate to the question of whether the rights are rateable at all or not, this particular case was concerned with the amount of the rating assessment upon rights which were liable to be rated. There is not a great deal of guidance as to the way in which the factors concerned in the estimation, for rating purposes, of sporting rights should be looked at and the Myddleton case is to be welcomed as helping to satisfy a distinct need.

It is necessary to appreciate that the rating assessment is not the amount which is demanded from year to year on any piece of property in respect of rates. That amount emerges from the multiplication of two factors, the rate in the pound which the rating authority of an area strikes for each year, and the assessment. The assessment does not change from year to year, it only alters at the instigation of the Valuation Officer for the area, or of the ratepayer, if there is some change in the character, amenities or use of the rated property. If the ratepayer and the Valuation Officer cannot agree on the amount of an assessment, either party can bring the matter before the Local Valuation Court and from there, on appeal, to the Land's Tribunal.

The theory behind the assessment is that it equals the rent at which the property could be let, and since the object of rating is to secure fairness and uniformity in assessments, this rent is not to be taken to be the actual rent at which the property may be let, or if it is not let, the best rent at which it could be let. Such methods of valuation would lead to widely varying and unfair assessments for properties of a similar type, for the rent of one property might be controlled by the Rent Acts, and the rent of another not so controlled, or the best rent could only be obtained by a letting which would damage the property or one not permitted by Planning regulations.

A Guiding Basis

In order, therefore, to secure this fairness and uniformity Parliament, in the various Rating Acts, has specified certain hypothetical conditions under which the property is to be deemed to be let, whether it is actually let or not. An actual letting may in rare cases conform exactly to those hypothetical conditions or may differ from them in a greater or lesser degree. The rent which would be payable under those hypothetical conditions is the rating assessment upon the property. The theoretical conditions relate only to matters such as the length of time of the hypothetical tenancy and to the manner in which items such as rates, insurance and repairs are to be assumed to be borne as between landlord and tenant for, of course, the incidence of such liabilities affects the rent which a tenant would be prepared to pay or a landlord to accept. These conditions which vary for different types of property, make no assumptions as to actual rent, but merely specify conditions which would affect the rent and the theoretical rent, which is the assessment, is to be ascertained by applying those conditions to an appropriate figure.

Case In Point

An example will help to explain this. The theoretical assumption in the case of a dwelling house is that the letting is from year to year, tenant paying rates and the landlord doing the repairs, but if, in fact, the house is let at £100 per year tenant paying rates and doing repairs it would follow that the theoretical rent would be somewhat more than £100 because the tenant when agreeing to his actual rent, must have reduced what he was otherwise prepared to pay because of his obligation to repair, which must be assumed to be the landlord's responsibility. The hypothetical rent is therefore to be ascertained by applying the theoretical letting conditions to the actual rent, or to the rent of similar properties, or to estimates of what rents are usually obtained under ordinary letting conditions of such property, or, usually, to a figure made up of as many of these elements as possible, and by making the necessary adjustments for the effect of the hypothetical conditions.

The hypothetical terms upon which a shoot is deemed to be let differ from those applicable to a dwelling house and the hypothetical rent which emerges is the rent at which the shoot could reasonably be expected to let from year to year if the tenant undertook to pay rates and insurance, to execute repairs, and to pay all other expenses necessary to maintain the shoot in a state to command the rent.

The foregoing statement requires some elucidation. It will be noted that the shoot is deemed to be let from year to year. This does not mean that the notional tenant is assumed to be aware, in negotiation for his tenancy, that the maximum period for which he could hope to be in possession was one year. If this was the position, such a short term would probably reduce the rent which he would otherwise be prepared to pay and the true position is that the tenant is to be assumed to be aware that he could be ejected at the end of one year, but probably will not be. It will also be noted that the tenant is to be assumed to be aware that he must pay the rates, repairs and other expenses. The measure of this liability in addition to rates is the amount of repairs and expenses necessary to keep a tenant who has agreed to take the property from year to year satisfied to pay his rent and the expenses include all liabilities of management of the shoot including keepering, repairs, vermin destruction, upkeep of cottages, bracken clearing, drainage, and upkeep of butts. All this must mean, of course, that the tenant would pay less rent than if he had not to assume these liabilities and it will be noted that this theoretical letting differs considerably from the usual type of actual letting.

It has been said that the hypothetical rent which constitutes the rating assessment is to be computed by applying the theoretical letting conditions of a shoot to the actual rent payable, to rents passing for similar shoots, and to estimates of what tenants would reasonably be expected to pay under the terms of ordinary lettings having regard to all the advantages and disadvantages of the shoot. It may be added that if the shoot is in fact let the tenant is to be assumed to be a member of the tenant market for the shoot. The significance of the Myddleton decision is that it laid down that strict regard must be had to the theoretical conditions in making assessments and that it demonstrated the effect of this regard upon the assessment itself.

Need For Modification

It would, of coure, be natural in valuing a shoot to assume that one carrying a good head of game would obtain a higher rent than one affording very moderate sport and it seems that this method of valuation, either accompanied or unaccompanied by rental evidence of the actual shoot or of similar shoots, was fairly generally applied. This will now have to be considerably modified for, as a result of the Myddleton decision, advantages and disadvantages which depend upon the theoretical expenditure by the notional tenant assumed to be in occupation for their presence or absence are to be disregarded in estimating the rental value and the rent must be assumed to remain the same whether the shoot is in good or bad condition in so far as that theoretical expenditure would, or has, affected that condition.

This conception may be somewhat complicated, but a short examination will show that it is entirely correct. Since the tenant is deemed to be responsible for the expenses of management, he is to be assumed to be in a position to decide whether, in so far as expenditure on keepering and similar matters can improve sport, he will pay for that sport, or if he will put up with bad or indifferent sport and save money. In either case he would pay the same rent and it is upon such rent that the assessment is based. If therefore, as a direct result of the tenant's expenditure the shoot carries a good head of game this advantage must be disregarded in estimating

the rent at which the shoot could be let.

The foregoing conception may be considered further. No shooting man will dispute the view that the sport afforded by a shoot distinctly reflects the money spent on it. One cannot have game and vermin and the only way to keep down vermin is by keepering which is not only a matter of wages, but also the provision of suitable accommodation with modern and expensive amenities. If, therefore, one assumes that the hypothetical tenant has by keepering expenditure kept down vermin, and has, to a considerable extent, improved the shoot as a result of this, the result of this expenditure is to be disregarded in estimating what rent the shoot would obtain because, again, all that is to be looked to is the rent which the hypothetical tenant would pay if he had to assume the obligation of keeping down the vermin. Equally it is no argument, when a tenant fails to keep down vermin by keepering so that the shooting is injured, that the letting value of the shoot is affected, for the theory is that he had decided not to spend his own money on the keepering. Either way, therefore, the theoretical rent remains the same.

It will, of course, be in mind that the actual way in which shoots are let rarely corresponds to the theoretical letting and in a great many actual cases the landlord undertakes all expenses of management and repair. The point again is that the tenant must for rating purposes be assumed to bear these obligations. It may also of course happen that a shoot is not in fact let and, in order to avoid misunderstanding, it should clearly be understood that it is deemed to be let and upon the theoretical conditions which have been considered.

It must not be assumed that every possible advantage or disadvantage of a shoot is to be ignored in estimating the rent at which it would be let, for all that it to be ignored is the state of the shoot in so far as that state reflects expenditure or non-expenditure on the part of the tenant deemed to be in occupation and it will be recollected that the measure of such expenditure is the amount necessary to keep a year to year tenant satisfied to pay his rent.

For example, a shoot could have a certain vermin infestation despite the fact that it was effectively keepered and a reason for this could be that replanted woodland on or adjoining the shoot was in the thicket stage affording cover for vermin and impregnable to the keepers. The picture here would be that the game take would be considerably more than if the shoot was not keepered, but less than, being keepered, it would be if the woodland was not affording such cover for vermin.

Inherent Disadvantages

The position here is that the advantage to the game take by the keepering is to be disregarded but, in estimating the rent under the hypothetical conditions, deduction should be made for the disadvantage of the woodland as vermin cover as this is a matter the remedy for which is not within the scope of the tenant's hypothetical liability and in fact something which he could not remedy. In the same way undue exposure, or proximity to roads, causing disturbance and affording opportunities for poaching are disadvantages which are to be considered in estimating rent because they are inherent defects the remedy for which, is not part of the management expenses deemed to be borne by the tenant.

It is probable that in any discussion with the Valuation Officer or proceeding before the Valuation Courts the question of vermin will arise and that the rating authorities will likely seek to establish that, in so far as this is a disadvantage, it is, pursuant to the Myddleton decision, to be disregarded on the grounds that the eradication of vermin is a tenant's expense. Effort should be directed to refuting this point by making the best case to the effect that the infestation is attributable to inherent disadvantage of the ground rather than to lack of keepering and, in this connection the views of keepers themselves should be a very great advantage as they, more than anybody, know the particular difficulties with which they have to contend in keeping down vermin.

For example the rat problem may be very severe and a keeper may have the view that his difficulties in that way arise from a nearby granary of an adpoining farm so that, despite his efforts, he really cannot reduce the infestation to satisfactory proportions. That is an inherent defect for which allowance ought to be made in the assessment and there must be many factors of this sort affecting the incidence of vermin on shoots.

These other disadvantages over and above vermin infestation, such as possibilities of disturbance and poaching through proximity to roads or large centres of population, nature of the ground, difficulties of access, poor hotel accommodation, and similar matters, the remedy for which is outside the scope of tenant's expenses should also be adduced as evidence of adverse affect on rent.

The whole question, and the impact of the Myddleton case, may be summed up by saying that where sport is bad to the extent that it could be improved by reasonable tenant expenditure there is no ground for adjustment in the assessment, but where it is bad because of inherent defects in the shoot these are grounds why the assessment should be lower than if the defects did not exist.

☆ ☆ ☆

Gun Gossip

by Celt

MR. JAMES ROBINSON of Melrose in the north asks the following: "Please give me an opinion on the new 2-shot Browning self-loader. Is it suitable as an all-rounder for game, pigeon, inland duck and clays? If so, I would like advice on barrel-length and boring."

My only regret is that I am unable to recommend a similar weapon of British make; but there is no such thing. Between the British single at something under £22 and the British double at something over £60 there is a gaping void. This void is at present most efficiently filled by several single-barrelled self-loaders of Continental make. Cheapest is the old 5-shot Browning which has been going for over half a century and now costs just over £48 in standard model. Next comes the new 2-shot Browning under discussion at just over £52, followed by the 5- or 7-shot Breda at under £69, although this latter already overlaps the price of a British double by a good margin.

All these weapons are well-made and reliable, although there are those who deplore the multi-shot gun as unsporting. I have seen trigger-happy youngsters—and others not so young—putting up a disgusting exhibition with such guns, blazing away at some wretched bird or rabbit until the magazine is empty.

Only One Criticism

This cannot be done with the new Browning because—although the fastest thing to load that I have ever handled—it will not hold more than two shots. It is, therefore, by our standards, a real sporting gun. Indeed, there is only one point on which I can criticise it; and that is purely a question of personal taste. I tolerate a rifle with pistol-grip although it is not necessary. But I detest a shotgun with anything except the straight hand on which I was brought up. Those 2-shot Brownings that I have handled and seen illustrated have a pistol-grip, although I understand that they can be supplied with a straight grip on request.

Is it an all-rounder? I have just written to a young Canadian telling him that he can easily find a perfect all-rounder for his country against any winged game he is likely to come up against, whether he uses an American pump, British double or Belgian self-loader. Mr. Robinson wants his gun for nearly everything here—including clays. Can the 2-shot Browning do it?

The answer is yes, but not as the gun comes, in one of two barrel-lengths and with any degree of choke requested.

Fitting a Choke

If I were limited to one gun between £50 and £60 I'd buy a 2-shot Browning. This costs £52 2s. 1d. I would then send it to the Grange people and ask them to shorten the barrel to 24in. and instal their Grange Adjustable Choke with Compensator. This fitted costs £6, including the barrel-shortening. It is an efficient, British-made accessory which varies the choke, almost instantaneously, from cylinder to full. The total price is now £58 2s. 1d. and gives me a gun that can be used against geese down through everything else to rabbits. Incidentally, after fitting the Grange, the gun would have to be re-proved, but the total price would still be under £60.

There is one other point; by "clays," does Mr. Robinson mean Skeet? Skeet is a very peculiar (and fascinating) sport. Most skeet champions use single-barrel repeaters, 99 per cent of which are fitted with a raised rib, costing something under £7. This is a question of accentuating the single sighting plane and is an important point. It is also a considerable help in fowling or game shooting.

Clay Pigeon Shooting

(The C.P.S. Fixture List is on page 238)

CLUB REPORT

Pevensey Gun Club has laid out an up-to-date shooting ground at New Barn Farm, Hooe, situated near the Lamb Inn on the Bexhill-Pevensey arterial road.

The layout is equipped with the latest automatic Down the Line trap and Purcell Skeet traps.

Fixtures will be held at regular intervals throughout the year and will be supported by the East Sussex Gun Club and Wildfowlers' Association and the Eastbourne Gun Club which is affiliated to the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association.

The next meeting will be a 100 bird open competition on Sunday March 23. Shooting starts at 10.30 a.m.

Note: At present there are no facilities for obtaining meals on the ground.

Future fixture dates are: April 27, May 25, June 22, July 27, August 24, September 28, October 26, November 23, December 28.

Further particulars may be obtained from Mr. Douglas Clay, New Barn Farm, Hooe. Tel. Cooden 3060.

Our local pests officer prepares a carrion crow decoy.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

ON the table near me at this moment is the latest price list from a well-known firm which has supplied game preservers with foods, appliances, and tackle of all kinds during the last 85 years. Although a great many of the items are not needed by me nowadays, I invariably read a new edition of this list with intense interest, because it brings back to me pleasant memories of happenings in my own career plus an indefinable atmosphere of more opulent days on our big estates, when gamekeepers were really important, and no expense was spared to produce the wherewithal for first-class shooting. I have no doubt that this firm has suffered a fall in revenue since those palmy times, but it is still going strong, and there is every indication that this trade is once again on the way up to its former position.

First of all I noticed that dry feed for pheasant rearing has not gone up proportionately with many other commodities. Just before the war No. 1 dry feed cost almost £2 per sack ; today it can be bought for barely double that sum, whereas many things have risen threefold. This stuff, I must add, is a complete food for pheasant chicks during the first fortnight or so of their existence. Many keepers use it longer than necessary, and this does no harm within limits, but the time comes when young birds ought to have something a little coarser. When I first reared on dry feed, I had the best season in the field imaginable. After the inevitable early losses, the broods grew marvellously, and I went to the coverts with an average of more than 14 birds to each coop.

One page in this list is devoted to appliances for rearing pheasants without broody hens, which is a sign of the times. It begins thus : "If you have difficulty in getting good broodies why not use a Special Brooder which can be heated by oil or electricity ? These Brooders should be housed in a draught-proof shed to which can be attached rearing pens 10ft. x 6ft. x 4ft., the top of which should be covered with roofing felt."

Brooders and Incubators

An illustration of the warm-floor brooder is given. It has several improvements, namely : metal droppings tray for easier cleaning, adjustable space bars to feeding troughs, metal food and water troughs, and removable woven-wire floor. Anyone who uses this appliance need give it only a few minutes' attention daily. The electrically heated, 100-chick-capacity model costs £14 10s., while a similar 150-chick model can be had for £19. Oil burning brooders are £1 cheaper.

The incubators, which are a necessary part of this unnatural type of rearing, are quoted here in two sizes. The one that takes 100 pheasant eggs is £22 15s., and the 240 egg size is £28 5s. These are hot air machines exclusively and have no tank or hot water pipes. They are oil-burning ; but electrically heated models can be supplied at an extra cost of about £3. Obviously the rearer who decides to adopt this method on a large scale will have, as I mentioned in an earlier article, a fairly heavy initial expenditure.

Gin Traps Not Listed

Significantly, gin traps are not listed. The bottom has apparently dropped out of this market already, which is hardly surprising when one considers that the Pests Act, 1954, not only bans them after a certain date but makes it illegal for anyone to possess them " for a purpose which is unlawful under this subsection (Part II)." One must assume that keepers, trappers, and others who are recognised as rabbit and vermin killers will have to bash up their old gins on the prohibition date, or throw them into the deepest water available. But here we have a problem. The Minister of Agriculture has power to revoke this order against gin traps, if rabbits get out of hand ; but if he does so, how many years will elapse before a new issue of gins are on sale ? And how much farther will rabbits get out of hand before the bankrupt trap makers get into business again ? An industry cannot be put out of existence, and re-organised in a few weeks. Therefore, it ought not to be an offence to hold gin traps after the end of next July.

For winged vermin we can, of course, use cage traps, which are mentioned in this catalogue. A hawk and jay catcher, two feet square, costs £3 10s. No other description is given verbally but from the small illustration appended I estimate that this trap requires to be baited with something alive. At least, a keeper whom I knew 20 years ago used a similar, home-made article, and it only worked when sparrows were put into the bottom compartment. A bigger catcher for crows and jackdaws (and possibly also for rooks) costs £10. It is six feet square. There is no illustration for this item, but I can guess the design; and at the risk of being called a spoil-sport, I suggest that any keeper handy with tools ought to be able to make this catcher himself. However, the bought one is probably sectional, and that can be very convenient, when it has to be shifted to a fresh site, or put into storage.

In addition to rabbit snares, among which is offered a " humane " type, are nooses for badgers and hares. The badger snares are 20-ply, but there is no mention of swivels, although these devices are an advantage when one gets hold of Brock. I am reminded here that the killing of badgers may not always be so necessary now to save plantation fences, if swing gates are erected on them across the runs. At the moment we have four badger gates on our plantation fences where holes were formerly the rule, and they seem to be used frequently. This does not absolutely guarantee, however, that fresh holes will not be made elsewhere occasionally.

Decoy Calls

I am also reminded that for the first time in my career I have had to set snares for hares, which have increased greatly in the last three years. In fact, they have now become a menace to the forester's schemes, and during the recent fall of snow there was proof that they were visiting kale and swedes at night. One set of tracks were even followed into the kitchen garden at the mansion. This hare had come down the drive, entered the open front gate, then ambled another 100 yards to the garden gate, which was also open, and made a bee-line for some Brussel sprouts. No other hare has ever been known in that area.

The section devoted to decoy calls inevitably suggests to me that those aids are rather neglected by vermin destroyers, although the crow call is particularly useful in the springtime. And it is probable that carrions could be lured to their doom occasionally by a few blasts on the rabbit call ; for these pests are always interested in any small animal which appears to be in distress. The crow call has, however, a definite place in the keeper's battery of weapons. It can either be used in conjunction with a properly mounted decoy, or it can be blown vigorously to excite carrions to a frenzy while they are circling over several of their own dead.

I have probably mentioned in the past how our local pests officer blew his call with such effect that I was able to shoot off all my cartridges at a mob of carrions which were milling over some of our victims on the shore of a Derwentwater island. It astonised me to see how those normally cunning birds came repeatedly within shot ; but I must add that we were well hidden, otherwise the result would certainly have been different.

But it is impossible here to do more than touch the fringe, as it were, of all those fascinating things in this 1958 price list for game preservers. There are nesting boxes, truncheons, alarm guns, coops, grit, pens, flags, pigeon decoys, egg sieves, gun oil, squirrel poles, sham eggs, signal horns, etc.

It has just occurred to me that the signal horn is another piece of keeper's equipment which is not used nearly often enough, although its distinctive note might eliminate any possibility of misunderstanding when beats and drives are being started. Once a pheasant beat, in which I was concerned, was started by a joker who managed to imitate the head-keeper's finger whistle perfectly. Birds streamed over unoccupied stands. But if he had been discovered then, he would not have been able to sit for some time !

A bunch of the boys "whoop it up" at the Dee W.A.'s annual hot pot. Only the chairman looks doubtful. Clubs round the coast are many and strong but there is still room for similar organisations inland, especially for helping farmers and landowners in the destruction of vermin.

The Young Shot

Clubs are Trumps

by Petrel

YOU will doubtless recall the old chestnut about the Guards officer just back from Dunkirk. Asked about the "party" on those beaches, he replied, with wrinkled nose, "My dear; the *noise* and the *people*!" Which is a sentiment often expressed, albeit in more forceful terms by many a rough shooter and wildfowler. For the majority of shooting men, although as gregarious as any body that shares a mutual interest "off duty," prefer to seek their sport alone or in very small groups, and any suggestion of organised sport is as distasteful to them as was the idea of organised games at school.

That, I suppose, is one of the essential differences between sports (which to me always infer field sports) and games. The latter involve, of necessity, more than one person, while the essence of any sport, to my mind, is that it is a form of relaxation that can be pursued by the individual, as and when the fancy takes him.

For this reason I shall always prefer shooting and in a lesser degree, fishing, to hunting. Not that the noises associated with hunting are anything but soul-stirring or the people anything but good company. But for my money there are too many of them, and although I appreciate that there must be some measure of control when the field assumes such proportions, this seems to me no sport for the lone wolf temperament, or for the man who likes to go his own way and use his own initiative.

All-Round Interest

Nor, for the same reason, am I over-keen on the highly organised big day in the coverts, although I am by no means so cynical as to deny that I enjoy this type of shooting which so rarely comes my way. The true enthusiast surely, appreciates shooting in all its forms and despises narrow-minded prejudices, and there is no reason why the keen pheasant shot should not be an equally keen and efficient wildfowler, or *vice versa*. All the same, if his choice was ever restricted, the chances are that he would choose the rougher, more uncertain sport, for the average shooting man worth the name is at heart an individualist.

It has become increasingly obvious over the past few years, however, that for the good of shooting generally, the individualist must to a large extent, sublimate his personal pride, prejudice, selfishness—call it what you will, and get himself organised. At heart he may remain a lone shooter, but alone he is no match for the difficulties and encroachments that continually make sporting life more awkward. The oft-told story of wildfowling since the war bears eloquent witness to this.

Without wildfowling clubs there would be little wildfowling left around these shores, and this is now appreciated even by those who have always opposed the formation of this sort of organisation in their district on the grounds that "organised" fowling would mean the rape of local shooting grounds by powerful, monied bodies in the manner of some large angling associations, and more gunners than ever descending on the shore. In actual fact, of course, the opposite has been the case; where local landowners were at the end of their tethers and threatening all sorts of action against irresponsible gunners who were ruining sport through weight of numbers and far-flung lead, they have tolerated responsible clubs and have been agreeably surprised to find that there is now less disturbance than hitherto.

For clubs, by means of their control, establishment of sanctuaries and so on, can only lead to more shooting for everyone—with the exception of those who have not the good sense to join in the common task of conservation.

Change of Tune

A week or two ago I had a letter from a friend to whom the idea of joining a wildfowling club always used to be abhorrent. Strictly a lone wolf was he, and in the fortunate position of living on the coast and having his favourite spots to himself. But with the march of progress came development to his neighbouring town and suddenly he found that he was alone on the shore no longer but must share it with tit-shooting townsmen and gull-worriers armed with rifles and no knowledge of fowl or respect of person or property at all. His change of tune was most marked. "I can no longer see any future for shore-shooting unless it is put on an organised basis," he admitted. "If only we had had a club before."

Now with over 70 wildfowling clubs already formed and operating, and others in the process of formation, the coastal shooting situation has been "tidied up" and is in a much more healthy state. There is shooting, and moreover, better shooting, for everyone. But inland, except on private shoots there is still a large band of individual guns wandering around, for a large part aimlessly, in search of sport, finding none, and becoming more and more disgruntled with the whole race of landowners and farmers in consequence. Likewise there are small groups of individuals enjoying sporadic sport of a modest nature, who, with a little more effort might soon find themselves with more shooting available than they ever thought existed. Here again the answer seems obvious enough—organisation, or in other words, clubs.

Inland Clubs

It is not so long since there was considerable correspondence in this journal on the subject of rough shooting clubs formed on the lines of the wildfowling associations. Then the whole idea rather faded into oblivion and not a great deal has been said about it of recent months. But there are signs of a revival of interest to judge from snatches of information that have come my way, and what a good thing it will be if the club fever that now grips wildfowlers can be extended to the inland scene. To start with, it would go a long way towards saving young shots from writing and me from reading plaintive letters like the following.

"I am 17 years of age and have recently bought a .410 shotgun to the value of 16 guineas, and now regard this as a waste of time and money. I have travelled round the district within a radius of six miles looking for a farm where I can use my gun on vermin. I have been to roughly thirty farms and have had only curt replies and no results.

"I don't think they trust me and my two other friends. I don't think this is a fair deal. We have been to so many farms that my friends think shooting is for the rich and for those who can get away with poaching."

By chance there happens to be a club in the district where this correspondent lives, and I have put him in touch with it. From now on it is up to him. This is a typical letter from a frustrated young shot, and the feelings expressed are not exactly destined to promote goodwill and mutual understanding between farmer and shooter. And it is the young shots in particular who need the guidance and help of a club, for be they ever so keen and responsible, being young, they are automatically viewed with doubt, if not with suspicion as soon as they set foot on the farmhouse doorstep.

For this reason it is important that any shooting club should make provision for junior members. This may not be possible at the outset, for if a newly formed organisation is to gain the confidence of those on whose land it hopes to shoot, it must be able to claim with truth that its members are experienced shots—and this means safe as well. But ultimately it is the young shots on whom the future success of the club depends, and it is up to the older members to train them in the right tradition.

At a recent meeting of a small group of pigeon shooters in Birmingham it was felt that although there are experienced shooters available and willing to shoot pigeons, and also farmers wanting pigeons shot, it was not easy for the two parties to meet. It was decided, therefore, to form the Midlands Woodpigeon Club, the object of which is to provide a "pool" of experienced pigeon shooters able to visit any farm to deal with pigeon at the request of farmers. The present members are all experienced in decoying and other methods of attacking pigeon, and undertake to respect the property and crops of any farmer on whose land they may be invited to shoot.

Clubs like this are wanted throughout the land, and I hope that we shall soon hear of many others following this sort of example.

Point-to-Points

by J. F. Wharton

IN times gone by there was a tendency to hold respective piont-to-points after the final meets of individual hunts. It was the custom to race over a line of country from one point to another, perhaps from one church steeple to the next—hence the word steeplechase. Or at other races the competitors would be started out of one field, to race round a village, across the vale, and first back into the field again for success. There were no set fences to jump, each rider took his own line and rode as straight as he could, by the shortest route. Such practices have almost ceased. With the exception of the odd regimental affair, all point-to-points now take place on circular courses, with built-up fences.

Spectators are no longer mounted to follow the fun, instead they contribute fixed car-parking fees to swell the hunt funds, and find all the amenities at hand, similar to a national hunt meeting under rules.

The present point-to-point calendar stretches from mid-February to mid-May and the allotment of individual fixture dates has got to be worked out very carefully, or two adjacent hunts will find themselves performing on the same day.

Many hunts which are near big towns, and have an obvious pull from the urban population, insist on holding their races on a Saturday when the gate will be at a maximum. Others, such as the High Peak Harriers, keep a traditional date year after year, such as Easter Tuesday.

Not a Long Season

With some two hundred separate hunts, all anxious to draw the crowds, it can be seen that the three months of the season is not too long a time.

Horses entered for any point-to-point have got to have a certificate, from the Master of Hounds with which they have hunted, showing that they have, in effect, been fairly and regularly hunted a minimum, certain number of times during the current season. These horses have also had to be clear of the premises of any licensed trainer for a certain period of months before racing.

This all amount to the prevention of well-known steeplechasers, in training with a licensed trainer, being unboxed at a meet, ridden down the road for a mile after hounds move off, and reboxed and taken home again—heavily rugged and bandaged. Such animals would be considered too valuable to risk in the hunting field and obviously do not qualify for hunter events. After all, the line must be drawn somewhere !

Point-to-points are a pastime for amateurs, though they have always been the starting grounds for future jockeys who might ascend to the top rung of the professional ladder. Similarly they see the first efforts of horses that may later take honours at Cheltenham and Aintree.

Bred in the Purple

Nowadays a good nomination race winner is bred in the purple and, in fact, is a better class animal than the winner of a moderate chase under rules. Many are Irish-bred and have genuinely gone through the hunting field. But more still, each year, have come through the sale ring, in December, at Newmarket and have been bought with the object of qualifying and competing in hunt races.

There are many suitably bred entires that are not fast enough to win on the flat, or over hurdles, which, when thus purchased, and cut and turned out on a farm, have done well in their freedom and rest. These animals are brought up for a light season's hunting at five years, or six, and start going for the prizes the following spring.

Some people make out that point-to-points are no longer a real representation of racing hunters. If by this they infer that the coarse-boned, half bred no longer has a chance—then they are quite right. But surely the majority of horses, in a present day field after hounds, are full thoroughbred. They can go all day with a wonderful action and can certainly carry the weights.

Practically every hunt in the country has to go with both hands for its bread and butter money, and besides various forms of hunt ball, the point-to-point in the annual mainstay. Surely the people who pay their way in to watch these races are entitled to the best card that can be arranged. Every runner in every race is " having a go " at these meetings. It is certainly not the meagre prize money, nor the challenge cup replica, that their owners are after. No, it is entirely the honour and prestige of winning under certain conditions !

Other people crab at the weights and consider twelve stone seven pounds an outrageous amount to convey over three miles and more. As I myself would have to put up two stone of lead to make the weight, and as many other point-to-point pilots have to do the same, I can see where the arguments comes in. But here and now is the reason—and it would be fatal to lower the scale. A horse that cannot carry this weight, across three and more miles of a country, is certainly not a hunter of merit. It would just be a road-trotting hack !

It is more than a trifle difficult at these meetings for would-be punters to make money. Unless one has back-numbers of *Horse and Hound* in one's pocket, there is no guide to form written down. Early in the season there is no limit to form anyway. One can only go on a fair memory from the previous season, the appearance of a horse and the experience of its rider.

Worth Noting

But there are other guides as well, and it is worth meditating over the fact that a runner, which has qualified with the Percy hunt in Northumberland, does not come down to compete in the nomination event with the Southdown, just to get a whiff of the strong, Brighton air.

Race cards are invariably well set up and show the breeding (if known), and the hunt (where concerned), of all entries.

Similarly, early on in the season, a horse which has had a race nearly always has the advantage over those that have not. By this I do not imply that every animal running for the first time is having a public, winding up gallop—far from it. But an early winner usually is that little bit fitter and can therefore gallop the legs off the other animals, destined to win at other meetings later on in the season.

But whereas the racing itself is the concern of most people, it is not the chief item for all.

Where else in the country today can we find the man who ties up his wife in a straight jacket and leaves her to extricate herself ? Where else do we find the clowns, and the minstrels, and the man who eats glass ? Not to mention the infallible tipsters, who having wisely invested their first million, are now back in their old clothes again, to help you help them repeat the performance !

A point-to-point takes a lot of beating, provided, of course, that the weather plays fair. A good picnic lunch, the chats with one's friends, and the freedom of going where you choose for each race.

If it rains though, few things are much worse. Even two to one bar two does not seem to convey that, once again, two hot favourites are expected to fight out the finish. One just sits in the car, or drinks in the tent, knowing that before the evening has begun the resident farmer, on whose ground you are parked, will, if he has got a good tractor and tow chain, have made a nice packet of cash !

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters and photographs are invited for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published. Correspondence should be addressed to The Editor, The Shooting Times & Country Magazine, 29 Old Bond Street, London, W.1. 'Phone: HYDe Park 2556/2557.

VARIANT CORVINES

Sir, — Regarding Dr. James M. Harrison's letter in your issue for January 17, you may be interested in the details of persistent aberration among rooks at Womersley, near Doncaster.

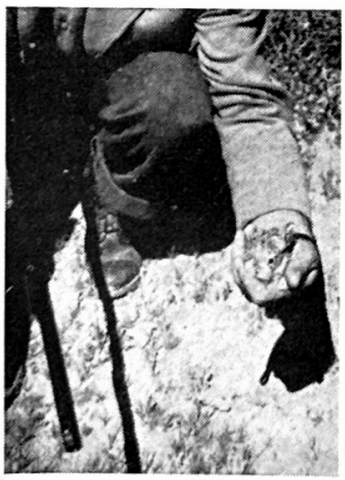
Commencing in the spring of 1952 and continuing to the spring of 1954, several young rooks were picked up during rook-shooting periods, each of which exhibited various degrees of barring or mottling. On May 14, 1954, I handled one in which every feather of the bird's plumage excepting the tail was tipped or edged with grey. It was sent to Mr. John Armitage, Keeper of Biology at Leeds City Museum who considered the young bird was well worth preservation, and he has supplied the accompanying photograph of this specimen.

In each of the three seasons mentioned, the mottled young rooks were confined to one wood, and were probably from the same nest. Farm-workers in the district have informed me that on many occasions they have seen an adult rook following tractor-drawn ploughs, so strongly barred that from the front it reminded them of a cuckoo. It consorted with birds of normal plumage, and it was the general opinion that this rook was one of the parents responsible for the variant fledglings. The old bird subsequently disappeared, and no signs of abnormal plumage have shown up since.

L. C. BALLARD,
Womersley, Doncaster.

AN EARLY PERSIAN LEVERET

Sir,—I enclose a snap of a leveret which I picked up in some foothills south of Ganoweh on January 10



The early January leveret.

last whilst shooting sisi. I cannot recall having seen one so early anywhere in the Middle East.

C. J. SETON-BROWNE,
South Persia.

CLOSE SEASON DATES

Sir,—Your correspondent, G.E.W. (Cambs.) (issue March 7) says that he would like to see the dates of the close seasons posted on public notice boards. In addition, I would suggest that the cartridge manufacturers could also help by printing the respective dates on cartridge boxes. If most of the leading manufacturers did this, then the culprits could hardly claim that they were ignorant of the close season dates (Unless they were muzzle-loader enthusiasts).

With all the ringing and tagging that goes on these days, I think it might be a good idea if most of our shootable birds were caught, and a three-foot streamer attached to their tails with the close season dates printed on them in six inch illuminated letters so that there could be no possible mistake day or night.

COLIN DRAGE,
Abbots Ripton, Hunts.

BILL FOR BARBARISM

Sir,—I have been reading the article of S. F. Braden, Kent (issue February 21). I am thoroughly disgusted that so-called English sportsmen would like to see myxomatosis introduced into this country again.

We all know that the rabbit can do a tremendous amount of damage. But I would not see even a rat suffer in this way. We were glad of rabbits in wartime, and I'll bet your above-mentioned correspondent ate his fair share.

K. DAVIS,
Furness.

DISTRESS SIGNALS

Sir,—Further to the letter from Mr. Barndancer in your issue for March 7, it has occurred to me on many occasions that the possible answer to this may lie in a request to cartridge manufacturers for a Wildfowler's Emergency Pack of either 6 or 12 Verey cartridges of perhaps 12- and 8-bore. These could be made up in a waterproofed container and should be coloured as agreed by the Wildfowlers' Association.

Rules for their use, period of firing, etc., would of necessity also have to be agreed upon to prevent possible misuse.

A. H. BUCKINGHAM,
Norfolk.

PIGEON SHOOTER'S PLEA

Sir,—In reply to "Bona Fide Pigeon Shots" (issue March 7), I, like many other people in the world, have to work for a living, and cannot shoot pigeon three days a week. I would suggest that if "Bona Fide" would be satisfied with 9 instead of 19 shoots, it would give people in my position a better chance of obtaining just one shoot. For that is all I require, one shoot, and one day's shooting per week.

I would also say that I never have, and never will "sit on my doorstep and hope." I have, in fact, been round most farms within a large radius of Windsor without any success.

Recently, I went to a couple of farms where, I was informed, nobody had the shooting. Would I contact them later when the "gaffer," in all probability, would say "yes." This I did, but I was refused.

This disproved "Bona Fide's" statement that many farmers have regular shooters and are satisfied with them. I suppose much of my trouble stems from the fact that many farms in the area are "Crown" farms, but how far afield does "Bona Fide" think one should go? Besides, one cannot go far without a car. If one has three days spare in seven, one can travel really far afield.

R. B. CORNFORTH,
Old Windsor, Berks.

[This correspondence is now closed.—Ed.]

The young rook with barred plumage in the City Museum at Leeds. (See letter, "Variant Corvines.")

POUND FOR POUND

Sir,—Regarding Alice in rabbit land (1958) Ltd. I propose that Mr. Wentworth Day be chairman of the first company formed. The main objects clause of the Memorandum of Association will, we assume, be "to get rid of rabbits" otherwise the directors might be acting *ultra vires*, and not entitled to their cut of the £60,000. As I am qualified at law to be appointed auditor, I shall pass Mr. Day's entertainment expenses (one half being repaid by the government) incurred in arranging a contract to purchase purse-nets and ferrets wholesale.

Talking of purse-nets, it also occurs to me that the Registrar of Industrial and Provident Societies may have difficulty in deciding whether "Tower-Bird's" "flams" should qualify for relief under this scheme, or whether he is entitled to a food subsidy. Perhaps *The Shooting Times* might add lustre to the scheme by offering a prize to the first person who can prove he has snared a rabbit with red tape.

But to be serious for a moment, would it not be wiser to save the £60,000, and then pass a law, stating that it be illegal for any rabbit to breed unless either both parents are registered with an Industrial Provident Society or they can prove that they have instructed their solicitors to form a company.

CORIN BERESFORD,
Middx.

WILDFOWLER-WIVES

Sir,—In the Author's Preface of his book "The Grey Geese Call," Mr. W. Powell pays tribute to his wife's patience. I quote:

"Only one woman in a million will put up with it, but I am told that there are thirty million women in Britain, so there must be another twenty-nine potential wildfowler-wives somewhere if you can find them.'

After having looked round for such a rarity for some time, I have come to the conclusion that there is none still unattached in my district. I am, therefore, resorting to your worthy columns to help me in my cause. Would any of the unattached band of twenty-nine please get in touch with me?

DISAPPOINTED DRAKE,
Darlington.

COYPU

Sir,—In reply to the letter asking about these animals, they are the South American swamp beaver which is popularly called coypu. The fur is known at nutria, and used to be very fashionable. It still is on the Continent, but there are so many pelts of first-class quality sent in from South America now, that British bred pelts have no longer any commercial value.

Some years before the war there were over fifty fur farms in England breeding coypu for their pelts. The latter were auctioned off in bundles of fifty or more at the London Fur Sales once a year. There were some escapes which bred and lived in the wild state in our marshes and rivers, but as they only eat vegetable matter and aquatic plants and do no really serious digging, they have done little damage and are now part of our fauna.

Here, in Norfolk, they are doing great service in eating up the vegetation that has been choking the broads and waterways. Colonel Cator who owns one of the biggest Broadland estates says that over the past seven years coypu have cleared twenty acres of his broads, and he can now row a boat over water that was completely choked up with vegetation. It is a pity that they are not protected by law, as while various associations are talking about what means are to be taken to prevent the broads from growing up, the coypu

is getting on with the job. They are very easy to trap, and can always be kept within reasonable bounds if they ever become too numerous.

ALAN SAVORY,
Norfolk.

GUN GOSSIP

Sir,—In his article of February 28 "Celt" suggested that the continued use of barrels longer than 25in. was due to force of habit and reluctance to discard old shibboleths. I do not think that this can be true. If 25in. barrels really possessed the magic qualities sometimes claimed for them they would — since gunmakers are very far from being fools — be in almost universal use. But I believe that 26-28in. is nowadays the most popular length.

The fact is that barrel length is a matter of individual preference. I had, myself, for two years a 25in. gun. It was a best sidelock by a famous maker, but I found it decidedly heavy behind (as I believe 25in. guns are apt to be for all but short men), so I disposed of it and bought a 27in. barrel gun which weighs about the same but gives a much better balance for my height (5ft. 11in.). A very tall friend of mine, an excellent shot, tried 25in. barrels and did not like them at all.

As for the claim that 25in. barrels cure one of a tendency to shoot low, I have used guns with 25, 27, 28 and 30in. barrels and I have found that my regrettable tendency to shoot below and behind the target is much the same with all barrel lengths.

"Celt" says that a 25in. gun can weigh 4oz. less than one with 28in. barrels. This may be so but a 28in. gun can be made to weigh only 6lb., and if one has anything lighter than that the recoil is excessive. So where is the advantage?

In another article concerning praise of the pseudo-sidelock—i.e. a boxlock masquerading as a sidelock by wearing dummy plates—"Celt" said that these false plates served a useful purpose in strengthening the stock at its weakest point. But the weakest part of a stock is just forward of the comb where it is gripped by the hand, and no lock plates, spurious or otherwise, ever reached as far as that!

J. E. F. RAWLINGS,
Somerset.

Sir,—I wonder if your contributor "Celt" in his February 28 article is just making an attempt to re-open the "battle of the bores" or is he an experienced enthusiast for 25-inch barrels?

These short barrels are handy and if the enquirer is confining his shooting to targets within forty yards they may prove satisfactory. There are, however, many like myself who have used numerous guns of different barrel lengths and borings who have proved that at anything over forty yards for pattern and penetration the 28-inch or 30-inch barrel has the advantage. If the 25-inch barrel was fully satisfactory in the field more would be sold and be seen about. I personally know several experienced guns who after buying 25-inch guns have reverted to the longer barrel type as being more reliable for full range shots.

T.G.H.,
York.

LIFE OF A GUN

Sir,—With reference to Mr. Farr's letter in the issue for February 28, I have a pair of Purdey 12-bore guns made in 1888. They have barrels made of Whitworth's fluid pressed steel, and have been well looked after. Within the past two years they have been overhauled by the makers, and nitro proved. Although seventy years old, they were not used for forty years after the death of their original owner, and were kept clean and oiled.

My object in writing to you is this. Many writers in your journal appear to take the view that all steel barrels are good, and all Damascus barrels bad! (Not all twist barrels are Damascus.) My own opinion (for what it is worth) is that most barrels made of real Damascus steel, by a good maker, provided that they have not been thinned by re-boring, wear, or rust, are capable of passing the nitro proof. Steel barrels, apart from those made of Whitworth or Jessop's steel, and bearing their trade-mark, do not bear evidence of their quality, as do Damascus barrels. This was pointed out by Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey many years ago, when steel barrels first came into use.

During the first decade or so of this century many cheap guns with barrels made of poor quality steel were made, and it is doubtful if many of them would have passed nitro proof even when new. I have in mind a 12-bore hammer gun which was advertised and sold by a London firm price 22s. 6d. carriage paid. Many hammer guns were sold in those days for under £5.

I do hope that any of your readers who possess fine old guns which are fitted with Damascus barrels will not throw them on the scrap heap, but submit them to re-proof, and then use them for many years with confidence and success.

JAMES STUART,
Wokingham, Berks.

Sir,—In the February 28 issue, I read a very interesting letter by S. Farr on the life of a gun. I have a pair of Purdeys 12-bore hammer guns, with 30-inch Damascus barrels. Both have some choke, and are nitro proved for 1⅛ oz.. They are the original barrels and they kill as well as any of the modern guns and a lot better than many. They weigh 7 lbs., and have front action rebounding locks. Purdeys thoroughly overhauled them six years ago, and told me they were built in 1870. It shows how long a first-class gun will last if taken care of properly. I also have a double 20-bore by Dickson of Edinburgh, hammer, Damascus barrels. It has just been nitro proved and stood 3¼ tons per square inch; 75 years old and as good as new.

I see also that Mr. M. B. Walker of Sheffield, is having trouble with cartridges in his 10-bore. I had the same trouble with my 10-bore until I had the recess reamed deeper to allow the rim of the cartridge to fit dead flush with the breech of the barrels. The old cartridges did not have as deep a flange as the modern ones have, especially those loaded with black powder.

J. H. EVANS,
Henley-on-Thames.

PIGEON DRIVES

Sir,—The pigeon campaign is but three weeks old and already it is an obvious flop. The pigeon are here, but not enough guns are out to deal with them. Why do we have these drives on Friday nights, the worst night of the week? The working man cannot get away from work in time, he has to wait for his wages. If he does not collect them he has to wait until Monday.

I have five good pigeon woods so I went along to the secretary of our local Wildfowling Club, in the hope that I could get sufficient guns to cover these woods. He said that his members were very keen, but found it impossible to get away on Friday evenings. Believe me he was right. It is just a waste of time. Why not have drives on Wednesdays or Saturdays? I am sure the results would be much better than they have been.

It would be interesting to hear what other people think.

A. W. MUTER,
Middlesbrough, Yorks.

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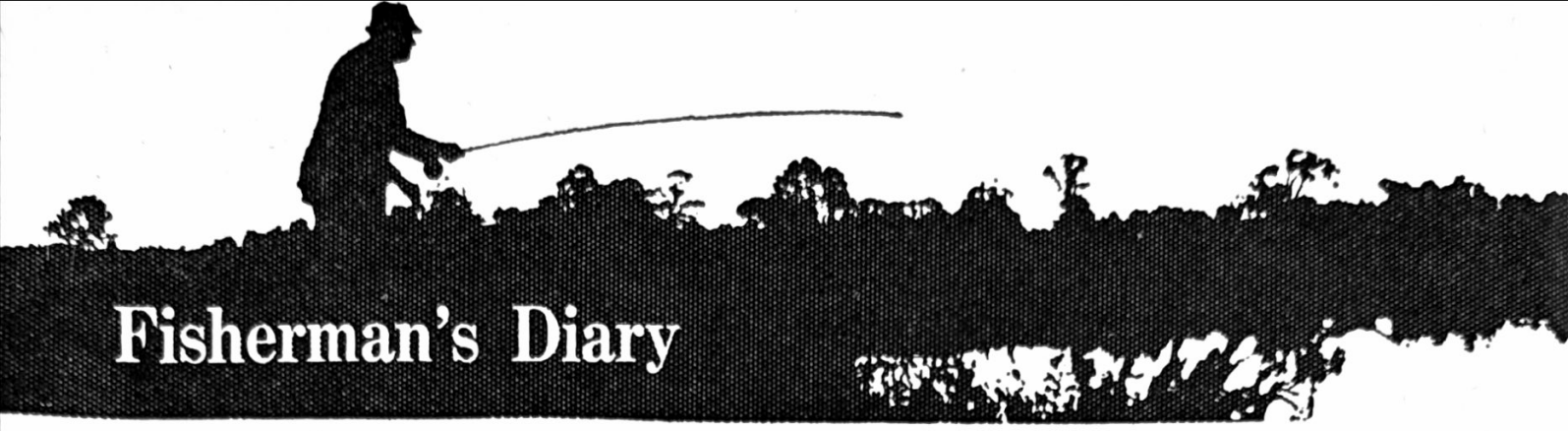


Fisherman's Diary

FRIDAY, March 21. The Vernal Equinox.

I sometimes wonder if the long-defunct geographer who invented that name sat in a frowsty study surrounded by cobwebbed books and solemnly thought to himself : " March 21—change of the year—seasons—Spring—Vernal. Vernal it shall be ! " Or was he, as I prefer to believe, an outdoor man who followed the changing seasons with a personal liking and to whom the now archaic word " vernal " was an everyday one which summed up his reactions to a freshening world.

I have, as I write, no knowledge of what weather the twenty-first may bring. It may be bright, calm and spring-like or overcast and gloomy. It may even be snowing steadily, but the immediate weather is a matter of little consequence. The season has turned, and for three months the days will get longer, the sun will move higher in the sky, and (when unobscured !) give us increasing warmth—and there will still be long pleasant hours of evening light for trout and coarse fishermen alike for weeks after the sun reaches its zenith at the end of June.

Except for one or two nasty stabs in the back (and the February one twisted the knife in the wound) it has not been a bad winter ; but this is the time to look forward and not back. Trout in my part of the world seem to have done well, and all the splendid specimens I have watched about their spawning in the local stream have long since dropped back to the deeper and strictly preserved waters where my fly can never tempt them. I think there should be a *quid pro quo* between the riparian owners of brooks and the owners of the fat trout who make use of them during the close season—a couple of days' free fishing on your water or no spawning in my brook !

However, the vernal equinox is actually here, and, as Browning didn't say, the lark's on the wing, the snail's on the thorn, the trout's in the brook ; all's right with the world.

Frogmen and Char

Scientists of the Freshwater Biological Association, whose headquarters are on the shores of Lake Windermere, have for long been of the opinion that the lake contains two separate species of char, and notes have been published on the spawning seasons and habits of these suspectedly different species.

The help of the East Lancashire Sub-Aqua Club was enlisted last month to further the inquiry, and descents were made by club members in various parts of the lake and to depths of over 100 feet. Samples from the lake bed were brought up, taken in areas where char were observed.

These fish are of more interest to scientists and gourmets than to anglers but I know a good many lakes, lochs and loughs where a sub-aqua survey might provide information valuable to anglers—where, for example, the best perch congregate and where they go in winter : or the exact situation of the holts or lies of the very biggest pike : or the habits and movements of *Salmo ferox*, those large and voracious trout that live in great depths feeding on the equally deep-living char.

The scientist denies the existence of *ferox* as a separate species, but the angler must make his own rules. There is far too great a difference between *ferox* and the small brown trout of the stream for a common name to satisfy all an angler's purposes.

Milk and Water

" Dairy wastes are among the effluents which cause a lot of trouble . . . They cause oxygen depletion with resulting decomposition of organic matter and the production of poisonous gases."

This was said by the Fisheries Officer of the Severn River Board at a public inquiry into new by-laws to control pollution which the Board proposes to put before the Ministry.

They would prohibit, in rivers throughout the Board's area, the cleaning of vehicles ; agricultural machinery ; apparatus or utensils used in connection with the production, processing or storage of milk ; sanitary equipment ; manure implements ; and implements for spraying crops. Special emphasis was placed on possible danger from the last named, and it was stated that seven cows had died in Worcestershire from arsenical poisoning after equipment used for spraying fruit trees was washed in a river.

Three county branches of the National Farmers' Union strongly opposed the proposals.

Colonel Stapleton-Cotton

Lt.-Col. R. F. Stapleton-Cotton died recently at his London home at the age of 82. He learned something of the sugar industry in the West Indies during his youth, but moved soon to South Africa, where he successfully launched several commercial projects. He served in the Matabele War and later rejoined the army for the Boer War. He moved to Egypt where he remained for many years. In the First World War he joined the Royal Flying Corps and it was in that arm of the service that he attained his rank.

His hobbies were fishing and golf, and he probably had as diverse an experience of game and other fishing as any man. In " The Art of Angling," E. Horsfall Turner wrote : " Successful transatlantic big-game fishing, and the fisherman's persistent rumours that there were tunny in the North Sea, brought Mr. L. Mitchell-Henry and Lieut.-Colonel R. F. Stapleton-Cotton to Scarborough in 1929. They made several cruises, and the latter hooked a couple of large fish which threw the hook during play. It was not until August 1930 that Mr. Mitchell-Henry brought a tunny of 560lb., the first caught on rod and line in British waters, to the weigh-in at Scarborough."

Dorset Sharks

Tunny fishing has been in the doldrums for the last couple of seasons, but the hardly comparable sport of shark angling continues to expand. Looe maintains its pre-eminent position, but other towns along the south coast are cutting in—and long may they flourish.

The latest recruit, I believe, is Weymouth, which has formed a shark angling club with 20 founder members.

Water Policy

The Water Act, 1945, authorises the Minister of Housing and Local Government to enforce, where he thinks it desirable, the grouping of local water undertakings under one administration.

The first compulsory order to be made under the Act was announced early this month. Herefordshire is to have a joint water board which will absorb most of the water undertakings within the county. This action will certainly save some duplication of work in field and office ; probably bring about a wider coverage of the area ; and possibly reduce costs.

On those utilitarian grounds—to borrow Jack Train's famous adjective —an economist might be all in favour. I only hope that this and similar mergers do not deprive local anglers of the sport of fishing the small and sometimes tiny reservoirs that hold such unexpectedly big trout. They neither know nor seek the fame of the huge reservoirs and the principal care of local anglers is to keep their four by two patch of water unadvertised.

Salmon Research

The fisheries section of the Annual Report for 1957 of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board contains statistics of the passage of salmon and smolts in the various waters under the Board's control ; of the salmon hatcheries and the " planting " of eyed ova ; and of trout catches and re-stocking. It is issued, separately from the main report, by the Information Department, 16 Rothesay Terrace, Edinburgh 3.

Research into the respective productivity of salmon which spawn naturally and of those whose ova are incubated in a hatchery, and also into the homing of the fish and related problems, began at traps operated below the Meig and Loch Luichart dams. The Board, the Scottish Home Department, and the Conan District Fishery Board, together with scientists particularly interested in the problems involved, are represented on the Salmon Research Committee, which is responsible for the general direction and conduct of this research.

At the Meig trap 13,944 smolts were counted, and of these 2,700 were marked : 613 fish ascending through the trap were also counted. 285 of the 254 smolts taken at the Luichart trap were marked.

If all goes well the work will be continued over five years, during which time marked smolts should return.

CORIDON.

Black Powder Fever

by G. L. Hoyes

(Chairman of the Muzzle Loaders' Association of Great Britain)

IT may come as a surprise to many orthodox shooting men to learn that there is in this country a thriving organisation devoted to the firearms of a century and more ago. The Muzzle Loaders' Association of Great Britain was formed just over five years ago, since when it has continued to grow despite some initial teething troubles.

Although few references have been made in the sporting Press and elsewhere to the activities of M.L.A.G.B., the increasing number of enquiries reaching the Association by devious routes indicate that there is an increasing interest in ancient firearms. For example, after the recent publication of the address of the Honorary Secretary, there were forty-four applications for membership in as many days. Every one application resulted in the applicant joining the Association.

M.L.A.G.B. is an effective means of bringing together those who suffer from black powder fever in any form. Black powder fever is just about as dangerous as wildfowl fever, in that once it has been well and truly contracted the victim is unlikely to recover.

The organisation of M.L.A.G.B. is similar to that of most comparable associations. At each Annual General Meeting a President, Chairman, Honorary Secretary, Treasurer and Executive Committee are appointed. All honorary officers of the Association and all members of the Executive Committee are liable to be called upon to serve as Range Officers at meetings involving the use of firearms.

The annual subscription is £1, which also covers the cost of the monthly copies of *Black Powder*, the internal magazine of the Association. The magazine contains articles dealing with all aspects of antique firearms, official notices, secretary's notes, letters to the editor, advertisements, etc.

A joining fee of 5s. 6d. includes the cost of the Association's badge, which is, appropriately, a facsimile of a powder flask.

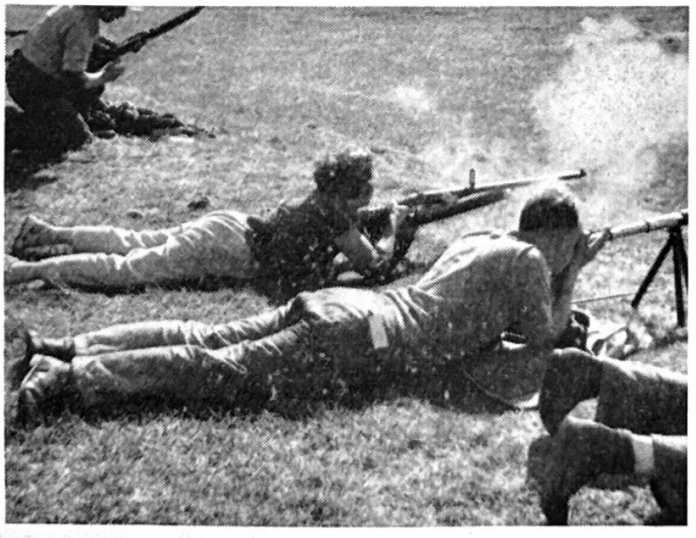
Generally speaking, members fall into one or more of three broad categories: riflemen, shotgun enthusiasts, and collectors. The Association endeavours to cater for all.

Rifle shooting competitions are held at intervals of about six weeks throughout the year, on a number of suitably located ranges, including the Running Deer Range at Bisley. Each year a two-day Annual Championship Meeting is held at Bisley, when competition is keen for the many valuable challenge trophies donated to the Association. Last year a competition was organised for lady members. This was so successful that it will be an annual event in future.

Percussion Caps and Partridges

For those mainly interested in shotgunnery, the secretaries of the eight local clubs organise clay pigeon shoots, and, where possible, rook, woodpigeon and vermin shooting. On one occasion an incredulous game-shooting syndicate invited four muzzle loader enthusiasts to join in a day at walked-up partridges. Before the day was over the percussion cap brigade had earned the healthy respect of their hosts.

Chairborne meetings are organised at frequent intervals by the secretaries of the local clubs. Those whose interests lie mainly in collecting often bring to these meetings rare and valuable pieces about which they can be persuaded to give short talks.



A ladies' competition is now an annual event.

A flintlock, black powder and white smoke.

M.L.A.G.B. does not organise or sponsor any activity involving the use of pistols or revolvers.

Rifle shooting is unquestionably the main activity of M.L.A.G.B. During the last five years the standard of shooting has improved very noticeably. Gone are the days when a competitor firing round ball could hope to win an open competition. One major reason for this improved standard of shooting lies in the fact that most members now have at least one rifle which will fire cylindro-conical bullets accurately.

The rifles most commonly used are of the .451 target rifle and .577 Enfield classes. Both these types of rifle fire 530 grain bullets. In the case of the .451 rifles the velocity is about 1600 feet per second at the muzzle whilst that of the Enfield is about 1400 feet per second. A good rifle of either type should be capable of making a four-inch group at 100 yards.

At the Annual Championship Meeting about three thousand shots are fired representing the expenditure of about a couple of hundredweights of lead and thirty odd pounds of powder. The cost works out at about fourpence per shot.

The preparation of bullets is quite a lengthy business. After the bullets have been cast, they have to be wrapped with two complete turns of thin tough paper and dipped in a molten mixture of beeswax and tallow. The grease lubricates the bore and softens the fouling. The paper is cut by the rifling on firing and leaves the bullet at the muzzle.

Only those keenly interested in the subject would go to so much trouble in preparing ammunition. The healthy state of M.L.A.G.B. is largely due to the almost fanatical interest of the members.

Safety Precautions

The question of the safety of old firearms is sometimes raised. Let me hasten to say that at every function organised by M.L.A.G.B. involving the use of firearms there are on duty officials qualified to carry out a detailed inspection of any muzzle loading weapon. These officials are authorised to prohibit the use of any weapon the serviceability of which is in any way in doubt. Friendly advice is always available to any who seek it, and, incidentally, to others who are unaware that they need it.

Membership of M.L.A.G.B. is not confined to residents of these islands. In fact a number of members live in Australia, Canada and U.S.A. Postal competitions are held against an Australian team twice a year. The results are in the main favourable to the home team.

For the benefit of the overseas members, a short film has been made dealing with the activities of M.L.A.G.B. at Bisley. The original is at present in America, whence it will be sent on to Australia. A copy is on loan to a shooting club who asked if they could borrow it.

This can be only a glimpse at the activities of a body of people who consider the acrid smell of burned black powder and white smoke rolling away to be essential ingredients of any form of shooting. Visitors are always welcome at M.L.A. functions. Officials are there to answer any questions about the Association, the proceedings or the weapons in use. No attempt is made to persuade visitors to join the Association but, naturally, anyone expressing a desire to join is given facilities to do so on the spot.

CHOKES AND COMPENSATORS—II

by Richard Arnold

POPULAR types of detachable shotgun chokes are the "tube" pattern. These are, in effect, extremely short shotgun barrels, varying in length according to the amount of "choke" or constriction built into the tube. Thus a fully-choked tube is considerably longer than an improved cylinder tube.

Many manufacturers of single-loaders, as well as repeating shotguns, supply their models with interchangeable choke tubes. The barrel is threaded at the muzzle on to which the tube may be fitted or removed, and, in effect, the manufacturer is supplying the sportsman with a set of interchangeable barrels. Thus, in one gun it is possible to have several choked barrels. The barrel itself is, of course, true cylinder and the actual barrel length varies according to the choke tube attached to it; thus, in the case of the Italian Breda semi-automatic shotgun, the standard barrel length of 23-5/8in. becomes 24-3/8in. when fitted with the "cylinder" tube, and 27-1/8in. when fitted with a full choke tube.

The interchangeable tubes possess the great advantage over the variable chokes in that though the weapon may have the barrel length varied, nonetheless the advantage of a constant length sighting plane is retained. A single loader, or repeating arm, equipped with a set of these tubes built by the manufacturer is a very efficient weapon indeed. With a fully-choked tube attached it is suitable for trap shooting or wildfowling at long ranges: with a more open boring tube it may be used for decoy work, and although there is a very slight difference in the weights of the different tubes, it is not sufficient to upset the shooter. So far as barrel length is concerned, a short barrel is quicker to swing than a long one and assists materially in securing clean and quick kills. Nonetheless, for trap shooting and for long range wildfowling and pigeon roost shooting, a longer barrel is an advantage because there is a deliberate aiming of the weapon in those circumstances.

Tube type chokes are best fitted to the gun by the manufacturers. It is not a simple matter to attach a choke to a shotgun as it must fit not only the outside diameter of the barrel, but the *inside* bores must match perfectly. Of course, where shotgun manufacturers supply tubes for their arms, as in the case say, of Breda, or Mossberg, the job is carried out perfectly. There are, however, detachable independent choke tubes on the market which may be fitted to gun barrels, and they are precision jobs. For example, the American Weaver-Choke, or the Cutts, built in sets of six tubes, and the Pachmayr POWer-Pac, consisting of a set of three tubes, may be fitted to any single-barrelled shotgun and give first-class results. There is also a New Zealand model, the De Bakker, multi-tube choke, which has been enjoying a run of success in the Antipodes.

Muzzle-heaviness is avoided by the use of hard alloyed aluminium for most independent chokes, though manufacturers of combined gun and choke outfits generally use steel.

Variable Chokes

Variable chokes are completely different types of device.

These patent devices are attached to the muzzle of a single-barrel shotgun and by manual adjustment enable the sportsman to alter the degree of choke at will, thereby catering for any type of shooting conditions he is actually encountering. Basically, variable chokes consist of the choke element, which consists of a tube segmented by horizontal cuts or slots, so that the element may be said to consist of a tube of "fingers." In addition to the element the other parts are the sleeve, the spring, and the sight. The sleeve turns on a threaded ring at the base of the element and the spring operates as a stop for each choke setting. The action of the sleeve is similar to that of a simple "chuck" in that as it is screwed tighter, it compresses the fingers of the element together and tightens the constriction of the tube, thereby increasing the amount of choke.

This variable type of choke is also known as the "collet" type, as opposed to the "tube" type, and is claimed to have the following advantages over the latter. First, by simple operation of the fingers it is possible to vary the choke at the muzzle of the weapon through as many as nine different degrees in a few seconds. Secondly, interchangeable choke tubes are made with only one sight height. Thirdly, it is possible to dent or damage, or even lose, a detachable tube. Fourthly, it is impossible, in the field, to change detachable chokes sufficiently quickly.

Variable chokes, however, do present a somewhat unaesthetic and bulky appearance at the end of a gun barrel, and do necessitate the addition of special sights. Their weight is not unduly high, however, and where manufacturers, such as Mossberg and Savage or Marlin incorporate a variable choke into their barrels, the lines of the weapons are such that the results are not displeasing to the eye.

Attachment Problems

The attachment of variable chokes does present some problems. Poly-Choke found that, to cater for the different variations in barrel borings, they had to stock a phenomenal number of different diametered devices. In Great Britain, wisely indeed, it is necessary to have a weapon re-proved if a choke attachment (tube or variable) is added to it. There are several ways in which chokes may be attached to barrels. First, the barrel may be threaded and the choking device screwed on to the threaded barrel. But cutting of threads into a gun barrel has a weakening effect and, mechanically, it is impossible to cut threads on to a gun barrel and screw a choke on it and have it line up perfectly. Other methods of attachment include silver soldering the device to the barrel, hard soldering, or shallow grooving. Silver soldering is fairly satisfactory for most devices, but hard soldering is not really suitable and if the barrel is submitted for reblueing, chokes attached by this method may come off as most blueing solutions attack hard solder.

If a choke device is being attached to a gun barrel, it is essential that all original choke must be reamed out, and the barrel shortened sufficiently to allow for the length of the choke attachment, which may vary from 1in. to 3in.

Today there are many varieties of adjustable chokes built in America by specialists who supply them to the trade and to sportsmen, and by gunmakers who incorporate them into their arms. There is no doubt but that they are well established, well past the experimental stage, and in the United States there are no fewer than nine manufacturers of these devices. In Britain, there is the Grange variable choke, built at Redditch. American names are familiar enough to all, Poly-Choke, Herter, Packmayr, Cutts, Emsco, Weaver, Master Chokes, Multy-Choke, and in July this year Lyman will be introducing their variable choke.

A New Development

But a new development has appeared in the variable choke field in the introduction of the remarkable Jarvis Flex-Choke. This is the original self-switching choke, which is carried out automatically from open to modified to full choke whilst shooting three successive shots. "Celt" in his column recently referred to this choke device. I have been in constant communication with manufacturers of shotgun chokes in America and on the Continent, and they have placed freely at my disposal much information on manufacturing, ballistics, and so forth. The Jarvis people have been no exception. The remarkable thing about the self-switching choke is that it really works. It can be operated automatically, to run through three choke settings when three shots are fired: it may be locked in any desired position in open, modified, or full choke at the shooter's option. Thus, for Skeet shooting, or over decoys, it can be locked in open setting: for trap shooting it may be set at either full or modified, and if double rise set on modified first and switched automatically to full for the second shot.

Incidentally the reason for the three-shot switch is based on the U.S. Federal Migratory Bird Laws, which limit repeating shotguns to three-shot capacity.

This ingenious device weighs around 6 ounces and is almost 6 inches in length, so that the manufacturers do not recommend an overall barrel length of more than 28in. with the device installed. It is operated by means of a tension spring which is wound up when the sportsman sets the outer sleeve to the "open" setting. The choke is gas operated, in that when the weapon is fired gas is tapped off and used to slip a release which allows the tension spring to turn the sleeve a notch tighter.

With a single barrel gun the sportsman with such a self-switching device, assuming he is using a repeating arm, is in an identical position to the sportsman who uses a double with two different borings. Alternatively, he has the advantage that he can set the device to suit conditions in hand where one kind of boring would be essential and others useless.

One advantage of the self-switching choke is that recoil is reduced considerably, as well as muzzle blast being eliminated, the gas port which operates the choke taking care of these phenomena. All other patterns of choke generally incorporate some form of muzzle-brake or compensator for reduction of recoil and muzzle blast, and it is to the 'compensator" that we next turn.

(To be concluded)

Clay Pigeon Shooting Fixtures

(Reports and Results appear on page 230)

Mar. 21: Annual General Meeting of the C.P.S.A., Grosvenor Hotel, Victoria, London, S.W.1, 3.30 p.m.

Mar. 22: Bowland & District G.C., Sawley, near Clitheroe, Lancs. Open Shoot.

Mar. 22: Taunton & District G.C., Practice Shoot, 2.30 p.m.-5 p.m.

Mar. 22: South East of England Sporting Championship, West Sussex G.C., Cocking, Midhurst, 12 noon.

Mar. 22: Kimpton & District Trapshooting Club.

Mar. 22: Ulster Single Rise Championship, Lurgan G.C.

Mar. 22: Waltham Abbey G.C., Essex. Practice Shoot, 2 p.m.

Mar. 22: West Sussex G.C. South-East of England Sporting Championship, Cocking, 12 noon.

Mar. 23: Reigate and District C.P.S.C. Club Shoot, Clay Hall Farm.

March on a Moorland Trout Stream

by Kenneth Mansfield

TEN years on Exmoor have taught me much about the small trout that live in the swift streams of the open moor and one of the lessons I have learned is that fishing is at its best during March and April.

In my first season I am afraid I treated the fishing with a certain condescension, for a 6in. limit seemed to me to be ridiculous, and all the trout I caught except a lone half-pounder were carefully returned to grow up.

I soon learned that they had little chance to grow and that an 8in. fish was fully mature, probably five or six years old, and unlikely to put on much more weight.

Imperceptibly the spell of moorland fishing bound me, and it is now sheer delight to spend a day or an hour on the high streams, fishing industriously for the small and hungry but exceedingly wary trout.

Later in the season I spend a good deal of time fishing on reservoirs: I have a very infrequent day on a chalkstream: and a longer holiday usually includes some fishing on one of the larger rain-fed rivers where trout grow bigger. All these are enjoyable in their time and place, but the best of days lacks something indefinable that is to be found by those of sympathetic temperament who fish the high moors. The time for such fishing is the early part of the season and the place for me is Exmoor; though similar conditions, streams and fish are to be found in many other places—Dartmoor, much of Wales, and the headwaters of Pennine rivers, to name only three areas, while countless burns in the Highlands of Scotland offer much the same type of fishing in more rugged scenery.

Exmoor scenery is as much a part of the fishing as the fishing itself. The round-topped, steep-sided hills enclosing narrow valleys may be covered with grass, bracken, heather or a mixture of all three; and from the heights there are views south to the plain that separates Exmoor and Dartmoor: north to the Bristol Channel and the distant Welsh coast: or west to the estuary of Taw and Torridge, with Lundy Island punctuating an open Atlantic.

For the most part, however, the angler is content with nearer views. He may start in a fairly open marshy valley, but as he pursues his sport upstream, testing every pool and, if the depth be sufficient, trying an odd cast or two on the stickles, the hills close in upon him until the stream becomes too small to fish or changes direction into some wider valley hitherto concealed.

Here and there may be lone, stunted and windswept trees; a long gap-toothed line of ancient beeches and crumbling bank will mark an old boundary or windbreak; and some deep and narrow re-entrants may have been planted with conifers; but on the whole trees are scarce and the banks of the streams free of brushwood, making the short casting which is all that is necessary an easy matter except in the face of a head-on wind.

Carefree and Active

It is carefree and active fishing, carefree because everything the angler needs can be carried in a haversack and active because several miles of water can be covered in a day. Constant casting is necessary. The pools are small and the sunken fly, the upstream worm or the floating fly do not remain for many moments in or on the water before being swept (if not recovered in time) over some miniature Niagara at the tail of the pool.

It is fortunate that waders are unnecessary, for they are uncomfortable wear for a long day. Rubber boots are only a shade less so, but something of the sort must be worn if one is to remain dryshod. Inevitably there are tributary streams and marshy patches to be crossed and it is often an advantage to be able to move at will from one bank to the other.

Weather is an important factor on the moor both for personal pleasure and for fishing. It is never likely to be uncomfortably hot in the early spring, but there may be days of blue sky and brilliant lighting when it seems that a stride or two would take one to a village seen a dozen miles away. This is superlatively pleasant weather for the fisherman himself, but it weights the odds against him heavily in his contest with the fish.

My own preference is for days when a wind of medium strength sends scattered clouds chasing across a blue sky causing rapid alterations of light and shade on the ground. This is not the best fishing weather but it creates by far the best stage lighting for the moor. Colours of gorse, bracken, grass and heather change like a kaleidoscope as the shadow of a cloud moves swiftly down a hill, slowly traverses the level valley and charges the opposite slope with a burst of speed, disappearing at the crest and leaving the stage bathed in sunlight to await the next cloud.

Ideal Conditions

As in most sorts of fishing, moor trouting is good in poor weather for picnics. I like best a dull day with high but complete cloud cover. This is not unpleasant and it reduces flash and the fish's range of vision outside its own element. Within that element it sees only too well. Drizzle without much wind is ideal for fishing; but I have found that low mist, cold rain and wind-driven rain reduce the angler's sport. Snow is a possibility on Exmoor in March and April, but I do not know how the fish react in these conditions. If I feel I must fish when it is snowing on the moor I descend to the plains.

Whatever the weather the trout remain wary. Fear of anything unusual is their only protection. The streams in which they live support little or no plant growth: there are no inexhaustible stores of water snails, daphnia, or the countless other creatures that fatten trout in richer valleys, and so these moorland trout eagerly seize anything that looks like food. There is no discrimination; fly patterns and sizes are immaterial and all the angler has to do is to get his fly on the water without frightening the fish. That last point, of course, is the snag. Short casting is essential, but any movement or vibration, a sight of the rod or its flash will send the trout scurrying to cover under the nearest stone. Casting positions must be chosen with care and approached with the utmost caution.

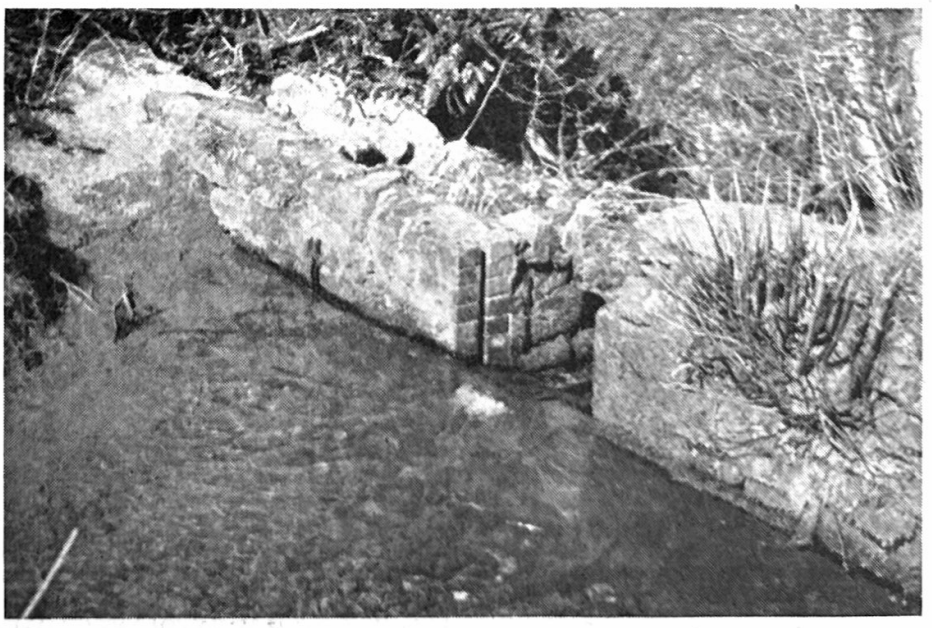
Sense of Proportion

Four or five well-placed casts exhaust the possibilities of most of the pools encountered, but in addition to pools there is always the chance of a trout under the glissade of water that flows swiftly and smoothly past a straight-sided slab of rock—a frequent formation—or in the circling eddy that lies behind a stone or stump which diverts the flow of the main current.

The trout themselves are usually dark in general colouring, but with intensely vivid spots. Though small, they are tough, stiffish to the touch, and superbly fit. Most men who come to this sort of fishing from more productive rivers soon gain a sense of proportion. Trout that run five or six to the pound cease to be consciously thought of as small: the occasional 4oz. or 5oz. fish is properly regarded as a really good one: and if a trout is caught which approaches the 8oz. mark it is viewed with as much respect and awe as is a 5-pounder from more nourishing waters.

INTENT OR COINCIDENCE?

Who was the sporting politician who arranged that the statutory salmon fishing season should open on the day that partridge and pheasant shooting ends? Or is this as coincidental as the ends and beginnings of, respectively, the coarse and trout fishing seasons?



A sluice-gate on a moorland trout stream.

The Snipe Dog

by John Baker

DILIS (pronounced "Deelish" and is the Gaelic for "sweet") is a two-year-old red Irish spaniel bitch, at least that is what Mike calls her. I am not a dog expert but to me she seems more setter than spaniel though small for a setter. She is long in the body, lean, has a shiny coat, is in excellent condition and is an ideal snipe dog. The venue was the south west of Ireland. Dilis had been lent to me and I had hired Mike, her handler, for four days to show me round. This shooting trip had been arranged some weeks ahead.

The weather on leaving England was hard and I was delighted with the prospect of finding the Emerald Isle full of migrated snipe and 'cock. When crossing the Border, a customs officer told me that the owner of Dilis had shot a record bag of 54 snipe in one day, the week before.

Arriving at our destination, we found that conditions had changed completely; the weather was warm and Mike said that the snipe would now be moving out of the bogs for the commencement of their eastern migration.

Leaving the road on the first morning, we had only moved ten yards into a bog when Dilis pointed a snipe which was flushed and missed with both barrels. To pass quickly over the next half-hour, I must have fired twenty cartridges before I got my first bird. Mike, the diplomat, made excuses for me; "Sure, sor, ye must be tired after the long drive ye had yesterday. Besides, ye are out of practice and there is the very divil of a wind blowing which is bad for snipe shooting."

Dilis gave me a look of part scorn and part pity which was more eloquent than words. If she had been able to speak she would have said that a bitch of her standing wasn't in the habit of having birds missed in this manner. There is nothing like snipe shooting for making you feel humble.

The real truth was that I had lost confidence. However, getting a bird with a good shot settled me down and by lunch time the bag was ten birds plus a water-rail which Dilis pointed and I shot by mistake. Mike called it a water-hen. I told him he was wrong and that it was a cousin to the corncrake, he said: "Yes, these water-hens turn into corncrakes in summer!"

A snack lunch under a turf-stack gave me a chance to take stock. If I had shot decently I could have had thirty birds, and if conditions continued like this I was in for some record shooting. As events turned out, we never again saw so many birds within shooting range during a corresponding period.

Of Outstanding Ability

In Dilis I had a dog of outstanding ability; in fact, I had never shot snipe over such a first-class dog before. It was an excellent day for scent, even taking this into account, I was amazed at the bitch's performance. She had winded the water-rail from fully 300 yards off and led me over a turf-wall and a hedge to the "point." On winding a bird, she would look round, and if I was not near she would wait for me, then slowly work her way forward, pointing when she thought she was in range. But if she was already on top of the bird she would freeze and remain motionless until Mike came up and told her to flush.

When I got to know Dilis better, I could tell whether the bird she had scented was close, or well out, and by the way she moved up whether it was a single bird or more likely to be two or more which she was working up to. She was an excellent retriever. She would run to the fall of the bird by sight and use her nose on arriving at the fall. During the whole four days we only failed to collect one bird which we marked down.

Dilis had two faults, if faults is the right word. She ran into shot, but then this is an excusable habit—in fact an asset, when she was working for her owner who is a first-class shot. Her other fault was that if there were no birds in the bog which was being walked, she would push off on her own, working far out until she found birds. In a way, too, this was an asset, but it was a bit disconcerting when you want to try one bog and the bitch prefers another.

Mike holding his puppy, with Dilis complaining of the time being wasted over taking photographs.

A High Proportion of Jacks

I made up my mind during lunch that I must pull myself together and shoot up to a standard which Dilis had the right to expect. I did strike form in the afternoon but the birds were few and far between and we finished the day with 16, half of them jack, an unusual high proportion of jack.

The next day was a bad scenting day, and in spite of many miles of tramping difficult bog we only got 12 snipe. Still, it was a valuable day, I was shooting well and Dilis and I were on good working terms.

The third day we decided to try for 'cock. We climbed two ghylls, expending a lot of energy without seeing a single woodcock. Dilis had no interest in 'cock. Knowing this, Mike brought a dog with him, and Dilis became a flighty girl and started a snipe hunt on her own. Just as we would get to a likely bit of holding cover for 'cock Dilis would point a snipe. In one case this involved a climb of a hundred feet or so. As I was reaching her in an exhausted condition, she flushed the bird! She did this out of divilment I am sure, being jealous that we were paying attention to the dog and not her.

Later, we started looking for snipe on the red bogs and though they were few and far between, miles and miles of bog were covered. The birds sat well and I shot straight, so I finished up with 15 which all things considered was a reasonable performance. It is so much easier to shoot well when the birds get up well in range and there is a light breeze only.

The Unexpected Happens

The fourth and last day we went to a large area of bog which began near the coast and gradually worked up to the foot of the mountains. By this time, I was in excellent walking fettle. We knew that we should have to cover a lot of ground to get a decent bag, and the most logical way seemed to be to let Dilis have her head and try to keep up with her. In snipe shooting, the unexpected always happens. We got on to a piece of very wet bog which was full of birds, but they either rose wild, or Dilis would point on the ground where it was too soft to follow.

Again I started off with a spell of bad shooting, but I steadied myself and restored confidence by holding fire until an easy bird got up and was shot. Eventually on higher, dryer ground we found a few birds and were quite pleased with a lunchtime bag of 9. Then on a small strip of bog after lunch we picked up 6. I was anxious to try and get 20 birds and all our energy and stamina were called out to cover as much ground as possible. I was shooting well above my usual standard and most of the birds which rose within range found their way into the bag. There was only one disappointment, after a successful right and left I missed two birds immediately afterwards, which ought to have been another double. But there was a reason. I was anchored in the bog up to my ankles and this made me just a fraction late with my swing. However there were several really good shots including a far-out rising and crossing bird which fell dead into a cottage garden. The last shot that made the bag into 26 was a bird which got up about 15 yards off, flew straight and then jinked to the left, but my gun "followed" and it came down dead at 30 yards, hit fair and square.

We were about a quarter of a mile from the car at the time, it had been a good day, and I felt that this was a good note on which to finish the 1957/8 shooting season. So I unloaded, but Dilis, in spite of a most gruelling time, gave me a look as if to say: "You are giving up because you are frightened you might miss the next bird"—and promptly made a point. I was not to be tempted and it turned out to be a false point, I believed she made that point deliberately to get me going again.

Looking back, 69 snipe in four days when birds were far from plentiful seemed good going, but really the credit goes to Dilis. Without her, the bag would have been a paltry one. She not only found the birds, but flushed them in a manner that helped one to shoot them. More important, keeping up with Dilis got my wind and muscles into a condition where I felt like having a game of rugger again.

Whilst the spectacular credit for the success of the trip goes to Dilis, it would be unfair not to mention the part played by Mike. Mike is a young farmer. He trained Dilis, and his keenness on snipe shooting has been implanted

(Continued on page 243, col. 1)

GUNDOG NEWS

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Beoley Kennels, Redditch, Worcs.

SEVERAL times during the past season I have referred to veteran dogs which have done well at field trials, especially among the labradors. It has long been my belief (frequently expressed in these pages) that we are inclined to consider our older dogs "past it" long before this is really the case. I am also firmly convinced that, in many cases, we hurry our young dogs along too quickly, trying to put "old heads on young shoulders." In many cases we are successful, but there are equally as many (and possibly more) where we fail to get the best out of a promising youngster because we try to cram too much into its brain before it can properly absorb the lessons. In some instances the pupil is all but ruined, and loses so much zip and confidence that the bright young spark becomes prematurely old and pottery. I might go so far as to say that a lot of youngsters are completely ruined as a result of too much haste in training.

Puppy F at six months "repressed" from the rolling rabbit.

Much—I nearly said all—depends upon the individual and its capacity for absorbing the work given. However, just as much depends upon the trainer and his ability to understand the variations of canine temperament, so that he can adjust the pace according to the aptitude of the puppy. Luck also plays its part, as does the weather, and, of course, breeding is all important. However, given a well-bred (from working stock) puppy with strong natural instincts and a careful handler, I am quite convinced that greater success will be achieved by proceeding slowly and carefully, allowing the puppy to grow up and extend its ability to absorb training, and by not starting repressive training too soon.

Early Obedience Lessons

I refer particularly to retrievers, although many spaniels, pointers and setters are better started later and taken more slowly. As I mentioned a few weeks ago, in the case of spaniels much depends upon strain. Some eager questers you will never "get on top of" if you have not taught them obedience by seven or eight months of age. You may also have trouble with their retrieving if you give them too much hunting at the expense of dummy work. I should say that as far as spaniels are concerned you will have to be guided by the breeding an individual temperament far more than in the case of retrievers, which mature more slowly. Such is my experience, at any rate.

One of the greatest mistakes you can make with a young retriever is to insist upon the wait on the drop before retrieving. This very essential practice has got to come, and is all important, but by starting it too early you tend to lose much of the dog's drive and natural keeness and, to a certain degree, you impair its aptitude for marking. Let me say straight away that this is at complete variance with my views of a few years ago, and I fully anticipate some readers writing in to remind me of past articles wherein I advocated early insistence upon the wait before retrieving.

However, you live and learn. In fact, you never cease learning about gundog training. I like to read up the subject every now and again, studying all the old and new books available, and also to watch other handlers and discuss methods with them. There was a time when, immediately I was convinced that a puppy had a natural retrieving instinct, it was taught to wait for orders before fetching the thrown dummy. This works very well with the super keen, fast and irrepressible youngster, but with the average retriever of six to eight months of age it may spell disaster as far as enthusiasm for retrieving is concerned. To insist upon the pre-retrieve wait in a younger puppy of any type is crass stupidity.

By all means teach obedience to a youngster, providing you are not too intensive about it, thus ruining its natural drive. But even if you do teach sitting, waiting on the drop and walking to heel, do not insist upon the pre-retrieve drop too soon. I have known people trying their puppies of five or six months on retrieves of such an advanced nature that many an eighteen month old dog would give up. Working to hand, stopping at a distance and all the rest. An exceptional puppy might be able to "take it," but the average youngster at that age just is not ready for it, and by forcing the pace in this crazy fashion you are going to ruin everything.

There is everything to be said for keeping a pupil interested. Although we read in books—and I frequently write it myself—that you should teach one step at a time and try to attain perfection before proceeding to anything else, discretion must be used. I know from my schooldays how boring certain lessons (and certain masters) used to be, because they ground away at one item of one subject to the point where the pupils lost all interest. It is, therefore, not only permissible, but desirable to introduce sufficient variety into your gundog training to keep both the pupil and yourself interested and happy.

To give an example, having taught your dog a certain type of retrieve — the "going back" exercise, for instance, vary it in the same lesson by giving straight forward retrieves, periods at walking to heel, free galloping exercise, experience of cover. Grind away at one particular form of retrieving or obedience and you will quickly have on your hands a bored, listless and dispirited dog.

Out For Short Spells

The time question is one which requires serious consideration. I do not refer to the total time required for full training, but to the length of time which each outing should last. Little and often is the accepted maxim for the gundog trainer. It is far better to have the pupil out for two or even three short spells per day than for one long, boring session. Ten to twenty minutes is usually long enough for a puppy during the initial stages of training. In fact, until a dog reaches the stage that it can come out with me for a walk round with the gun I seldom have one pupil out for longer than 20 minutes at a stretch. In this way the pupil goes back into kennel still keen and eager for more and, with luck, having done well all that was required of it. Go on too long with the average pupil, and you end up with an irritating and apparently stubborn individual, whose attention is likely to be distracted by the slightest thing. What is more, you will almost certainly become impatient yourself and may easily do something which will tend to weaken the bond which should exist between handler and dog. Give free running exercise separately, if needs be, and occasionally give the dog or dogs a "free for all."

I like to take a pack of dogs out for exercise after tea at this time of the year. First of all they are allowed their heads and please themselves what they do—within reason, of course. On the way home I may make them all sit for a few moments, perhaps walk away and call them up, or cast them out afresh to have another gallop. Or I may make them all walk to heel for a while before sending them out again to gallop. All this is valuable—it teaches a certain amount of obedience in company with other dogs, and it also makes them eager to get moving again after a wait on the drop. This sort of work can only be done with dogs which have reached the same stage of training, naturally, and is not overdone in any event, or

Puppy B—no repression.

the period ceases to be recreational from their point of view.

Over the last few months I have conducted an experiment, the results of which have proved interesting and instructive. This experiment concerned two labrador dogs, litter brothers of my own breeding and, out of the eight in the litter, as nearly as I could judge of equal temperament and natural ability. From an early age they proved fast and stylish, keen natural retrievers and very bold—especially in water. They were of the type which would take a flying leap into deep water the moment the dummy left my hands—no foolish running up and down the bank trying to find an easy way in for them. The experiment consisted of training one puppy to the more orthodox system of early obedience and insistence upon the wait before retrieving, whilst the other had its training delayed by three months and then was not repressed as regards its retrieving until a much later stage.

Puppy F was accordingly put into training sharply at six months of age. Walking to heel, dropping to command and whistle, waiting for the command before being allowed to retrieve—in all, the intensive first two months of the training course. Puppy B, on the other hand, was simply taken out for walks, practised on retrieving without any insistence upon the drop—indeed, given no repressive work whatsoever for three months, simply being allowed to grow up, enjoy his outings, learn his name and to walk on a lead for short spells, to come when called. True, he was instructed to sit whilst on the lead when I stopped walking, and later given one or two very moderate lessons in sitting to whistle at a distance. Nothing intensive, everything conducted in a very leisurely and friendly way.

Break in Training

My move to the Midlands brought a break for both dogs, and the extra work, bad weather and general settling in period meant that neither had very much done to them in the way of training for a further two months. About four weeks ago I started taking them both seriously in hand again and now, at the end of that period, the difference between them is shattering. Puppy F, who had the more intensive training, is a good little dog with a pleasing temperament and quite average for the amount of training he has received. However, he is neither so fast nor so stylish and enthusiastic as his brother, he becomes bored much more quickly. He is a slower retriever, much slower off the mark than B, is being positively mulish about learning to work to hand and is an indifferent marker.

Dog B, on the other hand, is learning so quickly that he quite takes my breath away. In less than no time he learned that he must now wait for orders before retrieving the thrown dummy. He took a little longer to learn to stop to the whistle when sent back for the dropped dummy, but once he mastered this he learned in two lessons that my hand signals indicate the direction in which he is to go after being stopped at a distance by whistle. He works with pace and style, and gets off the mark on the command "fetch" like a bullet out of a gun.

To sum up, there is a world of difference between F and B. The latter is a gentleman in every sense of the word, has that invigorating enthusiasm for work which positively inspires the handler, and gives the impression of supreme desire to please. His brother is just another pupil, quite average in every way, but lacking that "something" that makes all the difference when you are training, or shooting over, a dog. I readily appreciate that this experiment is not conclusive—it may well be that there would still be this difference had the dogs had identical training. Maybe their temperaments were not as similar as I imagined, that the one has a greater natural drive, will to please and capacity to learn than the other. All this I grant you, but I still feel more than half convinced that by allowing B to grow up and proceed slowly and without any attempt to force the pace, I have given him a start in his working life that will pay handsome dividends.

Round Our Way—I

The Bishop and the Law

by Walter McIntire

This is the first of a series of short sketches by Walter McIntire—a pseudonym which conceals the identity of a well-known figure in wildfowling circles.—EDITOR.

INTRODUCTION. All the characters in this series are fictitious and have no connection with any person living or dead. And of course that goes for Barrington, Belltonner and Todd's as well.

Which leaves me in a spot, because the Bishop is six foot three and very wide, with a mass of white hair and a deep voice. Taffy is lean and dark and has worked at Joe's farm for years and Alf Park is a big, gaunt, red haired fellow besides being the local barber. Roly looks like a lot of people, solid and hefty—sailor fashion—and it's a pity he's away so much because when he's about things seem to happen round our way.

Well I think that's it, except that I must ask that journalist who gets his hair cut at Alf's place whether I'm fictitious as well.

W. McI.

* * *

THE people round our way like to think they are law-abiding. Some go so far as to say that Sergeant Coot has a bobby's job but when I put this to him one day he would not entirely agree. What with attending the sheep-dipping and keeping an eye open for people who park by the zebra crossing in the High Street, he thought he had as much to do as anybody and more than most. Anyway, he hasn't time to walk round the marsh checking if we all have gun licences, though he has jumped one or two fellows.

I mentioned this in Todd's (which is The Black Prince down by the marsh) one hot day early in August, to the Bishop and Taffy and Alf Park. We had been talking about what should be done to stop a lot of people coming down before the season starts and banging away at everything on the marsh and missing most of it because it's generally too far off anyhow.

Todd thought it was Sergeant Coot's job, but the Bishop had said, "Hard won privileges should be preserved by those who have earned them." Taffy, who suffers from politics, had started on the rights of man and Alf had gone sour at the mention of police. But I think that was because he's been a bit careless over renewing his gun licence now and again.

Enter the Law

It was just then that a policeman came in. He looked hard at us and then went over to Todd. "Do you know a man named Arthur Pennyweather?"

Old Todd said, "No," straight off. He's sharp like that. We were looking at our beer not listening, but trying to think if we knew anyone with that name. The policeman turned to us—flat hat, gaiters—one of the motor cops. I looked out of the window and there was the car between me and the marsh with another policeman at the wheel. Taffy saw me staring and peered round the frame, too.

"What like is this fellow then?" asked Taffy. It was a sensible question I thought. He might be calling himself Smith or anything.

"Five-foot-ten-medium-build-dark-hair-blue-eyes - pale - complexion - last - seen-- wearing - a brown - hat - blue - suit - grey - waterproof - and-brown-shoes." It came straight out in one breath and from memory. It was pretty good.

But we don't see many strangers round our way and anyway, the only place I'd have seen him was in Todd's and you'd remember one there all right.

"No," said The Bishop ponderously. "No, I don't think—oh! But just a minute." He was looking very hard at Taffy, then he turned to the policeman. "Last Saturday was it? Yes. And the one before that I think. Saturdays definitely." He kept looking at Taffy, trying to get his wavelength.

Sowing the Seed

"Where was it you saw the party, sir?" asked the copper. I've never heard anyone "sir" the Bishop before, but he said, "Here—outside. Walking along the sheeptrack then over the road and on towards Barrington, that's the village two miles on you know."

"Yes," said the policeman. "And you're quite certain—?"

"Oh, no! Please!" interrupted the Bishop. "I might be quite wrong. He was a complete stranger to me." He winked at Taffy who joined in.

"You know—you got something," was all he said.

Alf sat scowling at everyone.

"Can you give fuller details?" asked the policeman looking from The Bishop to Taffy and back.

"Noo," murmured Taffy. Then suddenly, "Afternoon wasn't it? About now like?"

We all looked at the clock. It said 2.50.

"Yes," said the Bishop. "I think perhaps it was. And he had some resemblance to the man you describe."

The policeman went back to the car which drove off shortly afterwards. Nobody saw them in the village, but I heard they'd been seen in Barrington.

We had another beer before closing time and one of the local chaps who'd seen the car and is always after gossip, came up to Alf who was then carrying on to me outside the pub about the police and interference and a lot of other injustices real and otherwise. This chap said, "What's up?" and one or two other people edged up quietly to listen. Alf was a bit worked up.

"Snooping. They'll be back. They're after someone," was what he said. But the tale which went round was that the county police had been tipped off about out-of-season shooting and had been questioning us and tried to pinch somebody. Who started that tale I don't know. It wasn't Taffy or The Bishop for they wouldn't go that far.

The next Saturday the police turned up again—this time at 2 o'clock and stayed until after 3, sitting in the car and staring at everybody who passed. And they came the following Saturday, too. Alf's brother was questioned and Alf was more sore than ever about the police even though they only asked ordinary questions. Who he was, where he lived and so on. They had a go at me the last time until I said I'd been in at the start. But they were two new chaps who didn't know about that.

I don't know if the police ever found Mr. Pennyweather. But there's been no more shooting before the season and I think we owe it mostly to Alf.

THICK RICH CREAM

by Taproot

GUNS or butter, the central dilemma of our time, caught on as a phrase largely because the vowel sounds paired like a couple of turtle doves. Substitute "cream" for "butter" and nobody would have remembered it for long, yet I think most would agree that cream is, of the two, the more evocative of pre-war good living. How they rise at the reference, those serried ranks of little waxed tubs, their green landscapes pasturing equally green cows, their three velvet syllables announcing: THICK RICH CREAM. The tiniest cost exactly fourpence in 1939 and so came within the reach of all purses. Even in quite unpretentious cafes and eating houses a miniature jug usually accompanied a plate of stewed fruit. The crooner stated confidingly that "you are the cream in my coffee," while the source of his imagery, it is worth noting, set one back precisely tuppence more than a dash of milk.

In more elderly circles my Aunt Ethel "thought plums the most suitable *vehicle* for cream." Every middle-class luncheon party was bound to include a little comedy act in which the guest handling the ample but by no means bottomless jug poured gingerly watched by the eyes of all. Then the host with forced cordiality would cry out. "My dear chap, you've hardly taken *any*." Whereupon the guest tipped a little more boldly and a lumpy central core which had invisibly obstructed the flow suddenly broke covert and flooded the entire plate.

Technical Talk

This phenomenon was universally known as "an accident with the cream." Later it would be the subject of much technical discussion. The size of the gob, the extent of its damming effect and the triumph or contrition of the protagonist were all critically examined.

During the war years the prohibition on the sale of cream laid the foundation for all those unspeakable mock and ersatz substances that now exude from meringues, defile fruit, and perch meretriciously on the crests of melbas. As a milk producer and also as an occasional consumer I have long wanted to see an all-out campaign to re-introduce cream to the British public. It is welcome news that a number of big dairy concerns are now planning to push this product by all possible means during the year ahead.

The consumption of liquid milk has clearly reached its natural peak and is not likely to be increased by further advertising. English butter and cheese are hard hit by subsidised imports but there is almost limitless scope for popularising fresh cream and making the skimmilk available to pig keepers.

So many former feeding habits have been discarded because of changed social conditions. Game and wildfowl, snipe and woodpigeon are less popular and fetch less money because the modern housewife dislikes the task of plucking and drawing them. Millions—to their shame—prefer processed to natural cheese. But cream is naturally a streamlined product in step with the times. It comes in a clean neat bottle, sealed with a metal cap. Refrigeration in all catering establishments and many private homes keeps it in first-class condition for several days.

Odd stuff cream. It is neither a condiment nor a flavour, yet, in a passive way, it enobles everything it touches. Except, I believe, pineapple chunks. My Aunt Ethel used to declare that these, alone among fruits, were "not a vehicle" although I noticed that she nevertheless soused hers liberally.

One friend of mine, not a diffident man and quite unperturbed by "an accident" coined the immortal phrase: "Mother never bred a jibber with the cream-jug." The right kind of publicity should provide him with a wide brotherhood.

☆

The Snipe Dog

(Continued from page 240)

into her. Mike it was who led the campaign on where to shoot. First he would try the likely places, but if these did not hold birds, he would change his tactics and try other types of ground. I am sure he got nearly as much pleasure from a good shot as I did, he was untiring and would walk the softest bogs if he thought that they held snipe. Mike had the Irishman's gift of a back-handed compliment. One day, after a strenuous bit of bog-walking, he said to me: "Mister, how old are you?" When I said: "fifty-four next birthday," re replied: "Very good. I'm glad I wasn't out with you 20 years ago."

On the controversial question of are snipe difficult to hit, and are they really fast? If you are shooting badly, they appear impossible, but like everything else, when you get into form they are easier. I think that the rate of acceleration of a snipe's first spring is greater than that of any other bird, but when they get under way they are not really fast. A crossing snipe at 30 yards wants very little lead compared with a partridge. What makes snipe shooting difficult is the sudden spring of the bird which tends to startle you.

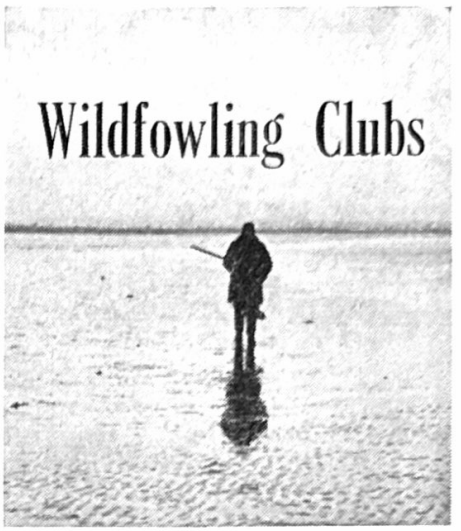
When taking a point, I find it pays to try and let your eyes take in a general picture of the ground 20 yards in front of you. Ignore a bird which gets up behind you; it may be the one the dog has pointed, but more likely it is another bird; there is not time to turn round and unless you are out on your own it may be dangerous.

If the bird gets up at your feet wait until it is quite 10 yards off before you lift your gun, there is plenty of time. If it gets up between 10 and 15 yards off bring your gun straight up and snap-off at it. If in this case you wait until you see the line of the bird it will be out of range. Try and take all birds between 25 and 30 yards (a snipe at 35 yards being a small bird seems to be a long way off). Within these limits you have a reasonable sized shot circle. If No. 8 shot is being used the pattern has ample density and at these ranges the gun needs little movement to align on the bird. Never shoot at birds at extreme ranges; if you miss, you lose confidence and there is always the chance that a second bird may get up within range.

One frequently sees references to snipe being slower in India. I do not think this is the case, but in India you shoot in much lighter clothing; the light is better and the snipe show up in more contrast, so one appears to have more time to shoot.

Finally, there is nothing like snipe shooting for speeding up reaction times. I have seen it stated that the real skill in shooting snipe was in the days of flint-lock guns. It seems to me that if one was to get into the habit of pressing the trigger the moment one sees the bird (possibly a dangerous habit), that there would be time for the gun to align itself during the hangfire period. I have a flint-lock gun. I must try it on snipe!

Wildfowling Clubs



The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland: Hon. Secretary, Lt.-Commdr. J. W. Anderton, R.N.V.R., 19 Castle Street, Liverpool, 2.

THE annual general meeting of the Dorset Wildfowlers' Club was held at the Red Lion Hotel on February 27. The chairman, Mr. Robert Bedingfield, opened the meeting and welcomed Sir Thomas Salt, Bt., and Sir Thomas Lees. The president, Sir Thomas Salt, then took the chair. Mr. Derek Hibbs, the secretary, reviewed the year's work, and the treasurer, Mr. L. Best, produced—as is usual—a very exact and well prepared balance of accounts, both reports being approved by the chair and the meeting.

Sir Thomas Salt was again unanimously elected president. In accepting, he remarked that he was always willing to help the Club or its members at any time. Sir Thomas Lees was elected as vice-president—a very popular decision.

Mr. Robert Bedingfield was returned as chairman, and thanked the members for their confidence. It was, he said, by the hard work of last year's committee that the Club had progressed so far, Messrs. Fripp, Bartlett, Miles, Jones, and Smith the retiring committee having done a wonderful job. The new committee was then formed for the coming year, the new treasurer being Mr. B. Jones, a popular choice, and Messrs. Miles, Smith, Jones, Sydenham, Kingsly and Ives, the executive committee. Mr. Miles was again elected vice-chairman. Representative of the Club on the Dorset County Council Wild Birds' Sub-Committee, Mr. G. Mathews, was re-elected and also accepted the position of press officer.

After some discussion, it was agreed to increase subscriptions in view of extra costs, and a short time was devoted to the position of new members which seemed to show a steady and encouraging trend. The coming year will be dedicated to furthering the sport of wildfowling in Dorset—more duck breeding, and possibly the introduction of more Canada geese..

Thanks were given to Mr. L. Best the retiring treasurer for the magnificent job he had done over the past four years. Sir Thomas then closed the meeting. It was re-opened by the chairman Mr. Robert Bedingfield and Club business on hand was discussed—this meeting being closed at 10.0 p.m.

* * *

The 5th Annual Dinner of the Fenland Wildfowlers' Association, was held at the White Lion Hotel, Wisbech, on March 1. About 80 wildfowlers and friends attended. After an excellent dinner which had wild goose on the menu, the Loyal Toast was given by the Chairman, Mr. J. Norman.

A toast to the Fenland Wildfowlers' Association was proposed by Brigadier R. Holmes, who for two years was secretary of W.A.G.B.I. In response Mr. J. Norman gave a brief summary of the main events of the past season.

The toast to the Ladies and the Guests, was given by Mr. Paton Watson, a prominent member of the Fenland Wildfowlers, responded to on behalf of the guests by J. G. P. Crowden, Esq., M.A.

Dr. B. G. Childs proposed a toast to The Birds and the Sport of Shooting, mentioning his own particular interest in the diseases of wild birds. This was responded to by Wing Commander Benson, D.S.O., D.F.C.

A talk was then given by Mr. Ted Eales, a member of the Blakeney Wildfowlers' Association, on bird life on the Norfolk Coast, illustrated by excellent colour films of his own taking.

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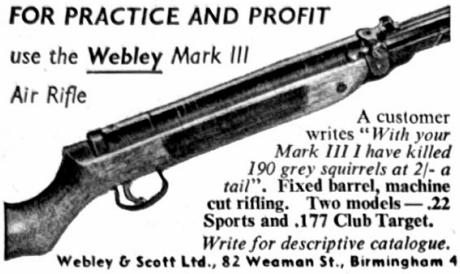

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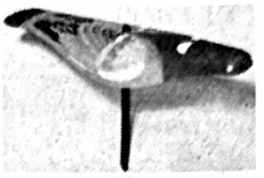

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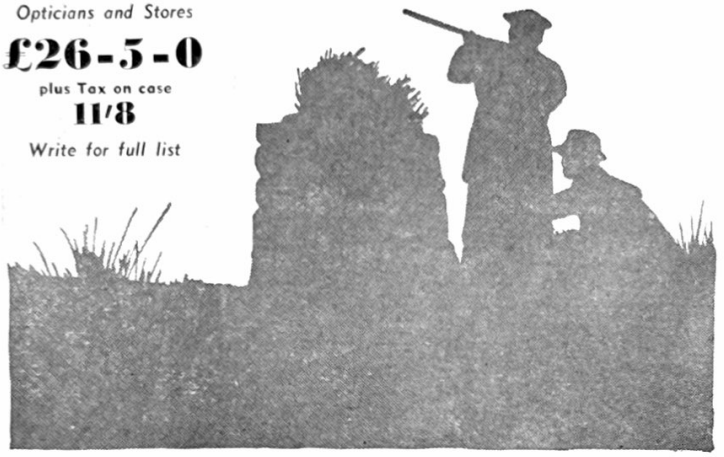

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